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*ALL OF CHINESE LITERATURE CONDENSED: A SOURCEBOOK FROM THE
PLAYWRIGHT, DIRECTOR, AND BIGGEST FAN*

by

WHITNEY J EMERSON
B.A. Appalachian State University, 2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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Major Professor: Mark Routhier

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ABSTRACT

Aristotle stated in his *Poetics* that theatre's dual purpose was to educate and entertain. Centuries later the Roman Horace and Indian Bharata echoed his same sentiments. I intend to realize all three theorist's ideas on the theatre by creating an original educational and entertaining work and bringing it to performance. The audience will retain information without being aware of learning if it is presented in a pleasurable way.

The most important geopolitical relationship of this century will be between China and America. In order to educate the American public about the culture of The Middle Kingdom, I propose to write and direct my own play, condensing all three thousand years of Chinese literature into a one hundred and ten minute performance. I will benefit from the personal nature of this thesis by experiencing every stage of a play's production: from idea to page to performance.

My thesis will be made of three major parts: conceiving and writing the play, a journal of directing the debut production, and a third section made of choices, influences, and reflection on the entire experience. In this manner, the ideas swirling in my head may be made clear to others reading this thesis.

The play itself will be a comical distillation of ten selected works of Chinese literature. Four non-gender specific American actors will seem to make up the show as it performs in a tongue-in-cheek way. Taking my stated goal of entertaining and educating the audience to heart, the overarching plot of the play will center on the four actors teaching the audience about the literature and culture of China by acting out scenes and telling stories. The information in the scenes will be targeted to a normal American citizen's educational level with liberal doses of humor added. The four actors will be playing fictionalized versions of themselves and at times

breaking character by explaining and setting up the theatricality of the piece to the audience. Part of the fun of the show will be seeing how these actors explain a subject as obtuse as Chinese literature to Americans. Perhaps a cooking metaphor is the best way to think of the play: I will chop up raw Chinese literature, the actors will boil it onstage, the theatregoer will consume the mix, and exit the theatre full of entertaining intellectual nourishment.

My experiences directing and producing the finished play will be recorded in a journal as a resource for future directors. I imagine directing the play will be the most challenging aspect of this thesis. How is the play changed when other people interact with it? How will the audience receive it? In addition, Committee Chair Mark Routhier and my thesis Committee Members, Mark Brotherton and Tan Huaixiang, will also give written responses to the play's performances. The play will be performed October 10-13, 2013 in the University of Central Florida's Performing Arts Complex Studio 2 classroom.

In the final section I will write a reflection on the entire process. This will serve the dual purpose of giving me a place to collect my thoughts and giving others a special insight to the growth they might experience when producing this play. Foremost among my influences in writing a play with this subject matter are the style and tone of The Reduced Shakespeare Company.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Before I speak, I have something important to say...”

I have been lucky to have the support of so many people and books during this process. I would never have realized this play if not for the efforts and love of the people below. Thank you!

My family: Mom (and Dad), for your unconditional love, support, and patience. I share every success I have with you; you are my foundation.

The faculty of UCF: Mark Routhier, for pushing me as a playwright, director, and student. And for letting me know that the play had to be shorter again, again, and again. Mark Brotherton, for helping me hack through the jungle of paperwork needed for a thesis. Tan Huaixiang, for encouraging me. And the other graduate faculty: Julia Listengarten, Vandy Wood, Jim Helsinger, Be Boyd, and Chris Niess.

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My friends and extended family: Michael Perry and Eric Borr for countless suggestions and feedback. Brandon Rutherford, Jean-Michel Rousseau, Brandon Yagel, Vince Keating, Robert Cattafi, Travis Garner, Zach Downing and others for additional great ideas.

All the Theatre UCF graduate students who have laughed, worked, collaborated, and commiserated with me. Thank you for sharing your heart with me.

My cast and crew: Ahmed, Alex, Justin and Andria. You all rock, and have made the re-write and rehearsal process a joy. I owe you each a dozen donuts. Adriana and Michelle for keeping everyone happy and on-track. Best. Stage. Managers. Ever. Andrew for the awesome projections. Tori Oakes for technical and emotional assistance.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Aristotle's *Poetics* state that the purpose of theatre is to educate and entertain (Gerould 45-50). I took that theory to heart in creating *All of Chinese Literature Condensed*. As the playwright, I combined Chinese literature with American pop culture in the hope that the audience could see the similarities between Chinese and American culture. As the director, I invited the audience to sit and be "edutained" for a hundred and ten minutes, enjoying themselves and learning something.

But which of Aristotle's two elements should be my focus? I don't want to "turn the audience off" by dumping information on them but I don't want to add in so little content that the audience doesn't learn anything from the production. I thought back to my personal experience as a Chinese teacher. After talking with some of my former students, I realized that the classes my students remembered the most were the most entertaining. I came to the conclusion that in order to achieve the fullest educational impact, entertainment must be paramount.

Recently I overheard a student mocking another student speaking Chinese by saying, "you sound like some ninja-talking little girl." Putting childhood taunts aside, this incident stood out to me as a clear example of the lack of cultural knowledge that Americans have about China. Ninjas are clearly Japanese (Blake 1-2). America's educational system teaches students a great deal about Europe, but very little about the country with the largest population and the US's biggest trading partner. The system is set up to show where American culture came from, not where it is going.

The relationship between China and America is the most important international relationship in the twenty-first century (Evans 1). Consider that two of America's most valuable

companies, Apple and Walmart, manufacture and import over \$30 billion worth of products annually from China (Ivanovitch 2). Hollywood now makes more money in China than any country outside of the US and is projected to overtake US box office receipts in 2018 (Landreth 1-3). A recent study by the China-United States Exchange Foundation found the economic relationship between the two countries will only become more important in the future, especially in the years between 2012 and 2022 (China-United States Exchange Foundation).

How is it that China, the country with which we Americans have such an important interdependent relationship, is still a mystery to us? A China-focused future-orientation of our education system is desperately needed. It is my intention to bridge the educational discrepancy or “brain gap” just a little bit and give an American audience member some clue about the culture and literature of China.

As both director and playwright, I had the opportunity to trace the entire arc of a single theatrical event: from idea to script to performance to memory. I collaborated with actors, designers, and stage managers to shape the realization of this work like I never have before in the theatre. My goal with this thesis is to create a director’s sourcebook; a collection of my thought process as a playwright and director. Also included are my trials and errors for any other director to pull from if they choose to direct this show.

CHAPTER TWO: CHOICES

The playwright is the only creative artist in the theatre. Actors, directors, designers, and the rest are all interpretive artists. After spending so much time as an interpretive artist, I wanted to challenge myself artistically and intellectually to do something different. I had a message to get out and wanted to craft it through the theatre.

Since my original idea of writing a play that comically distills all of Chinese history into a one hundred and ten minute tongue-in-cheek performance was too similar to the play that comically distills all of Chinese history into a one hundred and ten minute tongue-in-cheek performance that had already been published by Samuel French (Brown 7-87), I had to find new subject matter fast.

I racked my brain, trying to come up with something that I know a little about, have a passion for, and that could be presented in a dramatic way onstage. My thoughts first turned to my own time in China. I could write a play telling Americans what an American would feel like in China. But I wanted to increase America's cultural knowledge of Chinese society as a whole and was a little uncomfortable writing about something so personal. I thought of summarizing all of Chinese drama (classical and modern) into a two-hour production, but discarded that as being too hard to stage due to both actor training and musical requirements. After that, I considered collecting and dramatizing selected folk tales and Chinese legends. It would be one fairly simple way of presenting the stories that most Chinese people are familiar with.

That thought process led me to the classical Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, which incorporates elements of Chinese folklore and religion. I had purchased and read a children's version of the novel in Mandarin Chinese during my studies at Suzhou University in 2006 (Wu, *Xi You Ji*, 1-4), so I was familiar with it. The book is incredibly popular worldwide with tens of

millions of copies sold. *Journey to the West* is one of the “four classical Chinese novels” that have been studied, adapted, and broadcast all over the Chinese-speaking world. These four novels are to China what Shakespeare is to the West: everyone is familiar with them. I could write a play dramatizing these four books in English! I had already seen various adaptations of all four in traditional Chinese operas. Then the thought struck me: why not condense and adapt all the greatest Chinese works of literature? My decision was made.

Chinese literature would be the perfect lens to show Americans the culture of China. It was something I was familiar with and had a passion for. Literature is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online as “written works -such as poems, plays, and novels- that are considered to be very good and to have lasting importance: books, articles, etc., about a particular subject: printed materials (such as booklets, leaflets, and brochures) that provide information about something,” (“literature”). Culture comes from literature, and literature is key to understanding culture (Silbar 1-2). Now that I had new subject matter, I needed to decide on the tone and style of the play I would write.

As a 14 year-old I attended the splendid 1999 production of *The Complete History of America (Abridged)* at the Orlando Shakespeare Theater. I cannot understate the effect that performance had on me. In one two hour time period everything I liked about theater was combined: comedy, history, culture, reference humor, social commentary, entertainment, and education. More than fourteen years later, I still consider that show to be one of the best performances I have seen, bar none. If I ever wrote a play, I promised myself it would be as fun and funny as The Reduced Shakespeare Company’s series of plays. In preparation for this thesis project I bought and read Adam Long, Reed Martin, and Austin Tichenor’s *The Complete History of America (Abridged)*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*

[Revised], and *All the Great Books (Abridged)* (Long, et al 5-70). I knew I had a challenge adapting literature into a play because *All the Great Books (Abridged)* was the weakest of the bunch (Tichenor 1-90). But I felt that the tone and style of the show were just perfect for trying to summarize a huge body of work. These plays would become my models. I even held a half-hour phone interview with one of the founding members of the RSC (Martin Telephone Interview) asking questions about their process of abridging, performing, and playwriting.

What to Include

Once I had nailed down my subject matter and style, I needed to decide what I would include in my “condensation” of Chinese literature. China is one of the oldest civilizations on the planet with one of the oldest writing systems still in use. Written Chinese language dates back over three thousand years (Huang 1). This was going to be a daunting task. Ultimately, I decided on ten works that I felt gave the best insight into the people and culture of modern day China. Because there are many alternate translations of the titles of every one of these works, I decided on the translation that was known best to me and referred to the most by Chinese people speaking English in China. Under each work I will detail why I chose to include the work and why I made the creative decision to present the work in the way I did.

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms is the most popular novel written about the tumultuous third century of Chinese history. It is read not only in China, but throughout all of east Asian. The Japanese video game company Koei has created no less than eight games based on *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* where you can play as Guan Yu, Cao Cao, Sima Yi and all the other major characters from the novel (*Dynasty Warriors 8 Official Site*). I chose to present this work through the lens of Ahmed’s character learning about the novel through the

video game. Since many young, college-aged American men spend hundreds of hours a year playing video games, I thought it appropriate to frame the novel in that context.

I read both a simple Mandarin language version of *Romance* (Luo 3-255) and an English translation by Moss Roberts (Lo 3-295). I was struck by all the strategy and plotting contained in the book. There were clever tactics used by the characters that have universal appeal, but more striking to me was how “manly” all the characters were. The book opens with Guan Yu, Zhang Fei and Liu Bei’s peach garden vow to take decisive action ending the conflict brought about by the failing Han Dynasty in China. Relationships between male characters are more developed and complex than relationships between male and female characters. Combining the above elements lead me to the conclusion that Americans could understand readily: stupid college drinking games and frat boys (Kamer 1).

The Art of War

Not many works have withstood the test of time that Sun Zi’s military classic has. It has been studied by countless generations of army officers all over the world. Leaders like Mao Zedong, Colin Powell, and Ho Chi Minh have credited *The Art of War* with their victories (“The Art of War”). Most Americans might have heard of the various adaptations that other authors have made, such as adapting it for use by businesses, law, and other endeavors. I wanted to build off the idea that the wisdom of Sun Zi could be applied to anything.

It was a challenge to find a dramatic way of performing this piece. The work is short and consists of compact ideas and suggestions on how to conduct warfare (Sun, et al 94-128). I knew in order to give context in an entertaining way I wanted to dramatize the story of Sun Zi leading the palace women. It’s a famous tale in China and so darkly humorous it had to be included. I

hope the audience and performers pick up on the ridiculousness of executing people if they disobey orders.

I originally had the idea of taking quotes from *The Art of War* and applying them to the theatre, but I was ultimately unsatisfied with that result. We needed a visual demonstration of how principals like, “If I am able to determine the enemy’s dispositions while, at the same time, I conceal my own, then I can concentrate my forces and his must be divided,” (Sun, et al 106) can be applied. Having the characters fight each other would be too obvious and them playing chess would be a little less dramatic. I decided to have them do a thumb war. I think it turned out pretty well.

Dao De Jing

I knew I had to include all of the “san jiao” or “three teachings” that hold the greatest sway over Chinese culture- Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Just like literature, religion contributes to the creation of culture and the understanding of religion is the understanding of culture. The challenge was to present a religion onstage. It is much easier to present novels with character, plot, and story than to present something inherently undramatic and vastly complicated.

We needed a lot of contextual information before “the scene” began so I tried to perform it in a dramatic way. From *The Dao* we get the Tai Ji Tu, the icon embodying the concept of balance and moderation in Chinese culture. I thought it was important to highlight that so Americans can know the proper name of the symbol, know what it represents, and identify it as Chinese.

While re-reading the 1926 Charles A. Mackintosh translation of *The Dao* (Lao Tsze 1-39) for this project, I came to the realization that each line had it’s own rhythm. It was almost like a

rhyme. Being a huge fan of old-school hip-hop acts like The Beastie Boys and Run DMC, I first had the idea to present the works in rap form, complete with turn tables and microphones. That idea was ultimately discarded in favor of a hippie drum circle reading of beat poetry. Since Daoism is a pacifistic, free-spirited, individually-focused belief system, it was the stronger choice. Plus any other time Daoists are needed on stage, they can come out as hippies. Hopefully it will be one thing the audience learns from the show. However, I did want to keep the rap portion of *The Dao*, just for me. So I let the last of the three actors who speak *The Dao*, Ahmed, get up and rap the final lines. I'm happy with how it turned out.

Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems

While a student at Suzhou University, I remember several times being assigned a poem from *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems* to memorize and speak out loud in front of the class. Most of the poems are short and not too difficult to memorize. Just as we in the West will quote from *The Bible* or Shakespeare, the Chinese will often drop lines from poems in this book in daily conversation. When I asked several of my Chinese friends about quoting Li Bai or the other poets, the response was, "Sometimes you don't know how to express yourself after something happens, so you can always quote Li Bai." Fitting, I think.

Yuan Z. Xu's bilingual edition of *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems* is one of the best purchases I ever made. I spent hours going through the poems contained in this tome to select the best ones for the show (140-141, 178-179).

Dramatizing these poems wasn't as hard as *The Dao*, partially because of the larger-than-life characters of Li Bai and Du Fu. Friends during their lifetime, Li Bai and Du Fu make a sort of happy clown-sad clown, Laurel-and-Hardy combination in literary history. Du Fu's house blew down in a storm and his children died of starvation. Li Bai's death, diving drunk into a river

in an attempt to catch the moon, is the quintessential example of poetic justice after an easy life in the lap of luxury.

This scene is the most serious of all the works I condensed and it is like that by design. I wanted people to focus on the beauty of the poems and the compelling story between these two friends. I selected mostly the poems they wrote to each other to present in order to see the depth of their friendship and mutual admiration. In different circumstances, their roles could have been reversed.

Journey to the West

From the first moment I learned about the novel *Journey to the West*, I saw the similarities between it and *The Lord of the Rings*. Both are an epic journey involving special characters going on a quest while protecting the weakest member of their party who is essential to the completion of the mission. As Shelob blocks Frodo and Samwise from entering Mordor so does the terrifying Sha Wu Jing block Tang San Zang and Sun Wu Kong on their path to India. But besides the surface-level story of a journey through difficulty meeting various people- a theme seen in many American works, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*- there is the element of Buddhist allegory ever-present in the story. The journey of *Journey* is as much a spiritual expedition as a physical one. But I felt this would be lost on American audiences. So I chose to filter the Buddhist religious overtones through JRR Tolkien's fantasy novel.

I read three versions of the novel for this project, one in simple Mandarin Chinese (Wu, *Xi You Ji*, 2). I primarily drew upon the Arthur Waley translation, titled *Dear Monkey* (Waley 1-5), for sections to dramatize and the David Kherdian translation, titled *Monkey: A Journey to the West* (Wu, *Journey*, 1-6) for characterization and humor ideas. The Mandarin version was used to check the correct pinyin Romanization for each character's name.

The Monkey King Sun Wu Kong is one of the most important characters in Chinese literature. He can fly, is nigh-invulnerable, and quickly bests any monster or demon who crosses paths with him. Monkey King is to China as Superman is to America. But, like Superman, due to his lack of flaws and vast supernatural abilities, many stories involving him are not as compelling as they could be. How do you challenge an invincible being? The joy for the audience is to see this tricky monkey be tamed by the patient hand of a monk, with a liberal amount of help from the Chinese goddess of mercy, Guan Yin. The majority of the work is taken directly from the novel, except for “The Fellowship of the Monk” and “The King” sections. What could be more American than Elvis impersonation?

On a personal note, if I ever get around to writing the memoirs of my time in China I want to title them ‘*A Journey to the East.*’ I’d cast myself as Zhu Ba Jie, naturally.

The Outlaws of the Marsh

The tales from *Outlaws of the Marsh* can best be compared to American Tall Tales or Robin Hood’s daring deeds. Wu Song killing the tiger is analogous to Paul Bunyan clearing the Dakotas. They are both mighty tales of humanity’s triumph over natural forces. Lu Zhi Shen’s drinking is just like Friar Tuck cracking Robin Hood with his quarterstaff. Both holy men show a blatant disregard for religious protocol. These tales are far from the truth but are so gosh-darn entertaining to hear that they have survived hundreds of years.

I had experienced less of *Outlaws of the Marsh* than *Journey* and *Romance*, so I decided to read three versions of the work. I read my simple Mandarin Chinese version, edited by Yan Lin and Ruan Quan first to get a good foundation in the characters (Shi, *Shui*, 1-231). Sidney Shapiro’s translation of *Outlaws* (Shi, *Outlaws*, 3-79) had the most detail so finally I read the second part of the John Dent-Young translation titled *The Tiger Killers: Part Two of The*

Marshes of Mount Liang (Shi, *Tiger*, 25-231). With the heroic deeds freshly put in my mind, I set out to adapt.

I didn't feel that there needed to be much "enhancement" of the stories from *Outlaws of the Marsh* in order for American audiences to understand them. We as a people have always supported the outlaws, the ones who fought for righteousness and resisted tyranny. From the Revolutionary War through *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to the recent first person shooter video game *Homefront*, (Moriarty 1-2) Americans always want to root for the underdog to win. I make the comparison in the play to *The Adventures of Robin Hood* robbing from the rich and giving to the poor.

The Analects

I remember visiting a large Confucian temple in Suzhou, China the first week I was there. I was impressed with the beautiful old painting hanging above the incense brazier in the main hall of the temple. *The Analects* form one of the four books that make up the foundation of Confucianism, but *The Analects* themselves are a rather undramatic collection of quotes and "fun-sized" examples of how people should behave towards each other (Confucius 4, 7, 86). How could I have this text embodied onstage?

Being a huge fan of "Confucius says" jokes from an early age, I wanted to see if I could have Confucius come out onstage to present his wisdom interspaced with jokes. That eventually melded with my love of stand-up comedians Jerry Seinfeld and Rodney Dangerfield. The result is one of the sections that I am proudest of: Confucius doing *The Analects* as stand-up comedy. It encapsulates the spirit and message of the play, striking a balance between entertainment, education, and incongruity. At the end I wanted Confucius to lean into the audience and say "Hey- you've just been entertained and educated at the same time. You're welcome."

The Legend of Whitesnake

From the very beginning of this project, I wanted to make sure that Chinese drama was included in this list, just as lists of the “best western literature” often include Beckett and Shakespeare. I made the character Alex choose one of four plays in front of the audience because I had to do the same thing myself in my head (Wang 99-230). I had read or seen each of those four plays prior to starting the thesis and, after a quick refresh reading, could debate their merits in my head.

I also considered including two works of Chinese drama in this play, one traditional and one modern, but I discarded this idea early on. I managed to work a hint of it in at the end of Act I where Alex says, “...modern writers like Cao Yu and Lao She...”

I remember seeing a scene from *The Legend of Whitesnake* during my time in Suzhou. Though it was performed in the Kun Qu style that east China is known for and not the more popular Beijing Opera style, I was touched by the sincere emotions and beautiful story. I had also traveled to Hangzhou’s West Lake, where the opening and closing scenes of the drama takes place. Perhaps that made the show more real to me. Wilt Idema’s *The White Snake and Her Son* gave me a good plot summary of *The Legend of Whitesnake* (Idema 1-6), on which I based my adaptation.

I have been a fan of 1980’s heavy metal and hair metal since I was young. I vividly remember my dad tuning the car radio to “Enter Sandman” by Metallica as we drove home one summer day. At first listen I was hooked and already rocking out. In my research on Chinese drama, I noticed that Beijing Opera’s performance aesthetics aligned almost perfectly with a Def Leppard music video- crazy hair, shrieking, and elaborate costumes. And then I realized the band Whitesake was very close to *The Legend of Whitesnake*. I could just repurpose the words to one

of their songs with the plot of the Beijing Opera! The resulting cacophonous, chaotic, cathartic mash-up is something everyone has commented on.

Dream of Red Mansions

Dream of Red Mansions or *The Story of the Stone* is the equivalent of a romance novel. The whole story is premised by a magical stone in heaven wanting to experience mortal life on earth. He wants to love and be loved. A goddess in heaven grants the stone's wish and it is born into the form of pretty-boy protagonist Jia Bao Yu (Cao, *The Story*, 1-66). It is left ambiguous whether Jia Bao Yu himself or the magical jade that he was born with are the actual heavenly stone. It has allegorical themes in both Daoism and Buddhism and was written in the middle Qing dynasty as a social commentary on the upper classes. Intrigue and romance, promises broken and kept fill the pages of this novel (Chi 90-137). In the end, Jia Bao Yu decides to forsake the evils of the world and join a monastery.

As one of the four classical Chinese novels, I knew that I had to include it in the play but did not relish having to read and condense the whole thing. I read my children's Mandarin Chinese version more for the pictures of the characters than for the content of the book (Cao, *Hong*, 68, 76, 83, 114) The book is slow starting and while it does feature compelling characters, it does not have a very interesting plot. Long passages are dedicated to the dreams of minor characters. The fates of every major character are foretold in some way so that a second reading only enriches the reader. Almost every college-educated Chinese girl I talked with in China told me it was their favorite book.

The true appeal of the book, like most soap operas, is the characters. Once you become invested, you can't stop. I immediately saw the parallels between this book and American daytime soaps like *All My Children*, *The Young and the Restless*, and *As the World Turns*. All I

had to do was focus on the four most important characters and create a comical reduction of their most dramatic scenes mixed with American soap opera conventions. Other than heightening the melodramatic elements of soap operas I kept most of the classic moments from the novel as the same, even the part where Dai Yu is upset at Jia Bao Yu over being compared to a silly child actress, (Cao, *The Story*, 438).

The Collected Quotations of Mao Zedong

No other figure has dominated modern Chinese society more than Mao Zedong. The book of his collected quotations was compiled by Lin Biao and made into required reading for an entire generation of Chinese who were in school during the Cultural Revolution 1967-1977 (Mao xxxi-xxxiv). I skimmed the Mandarin Chinese version of Mao's book when in China but really enjoyed the bombastic English language translation I read for this thesis project (Mao 46, 129).

I had always been struck with how incongruous Chairman Mao looked when contrasted with his violent rhetoric. Could this tubby, balding, shrill-voiced country bumpkin have really ruthlessly controlled one of the most important countries in the world? Did this seemingly mild-mannered former librarian really reign over the deaths of over forty-five million Chinese in The Great Leap Forward (Akbar 1)? The audience had to see him embodied onstage so they could fathom the delicious dichotomy between the man and his book.

The second scene I wrote for the play was the scene between Groucho Marx and Mao. I wanted to contrast the very Chinese Mao with some form of very American humor. I thought of writing Jerry Seinfeld giving Mao tips on standup comedy, but that idea was morphed into Confucius's presentation of *The Analects*. I focused on what characteristics the best American comics would have: irreverence, quick timing and a razor sharp wit. Once I had these characteristics down I knew it had to be Groucho Marx. From that point I could almost hear his

acerbic wit going up against Mao's Marxist dogma. The scene would have to be modeled off of Groucho's popular 1950's game show "You Bet Your Life," (Ingram 1-2). It practically wrote itself.

Researching the Playwright

Researching the background of the playwright can often yield insight into their work. Knowing my background and what my experience in China was like is an important part of understanding the inspiration and creation of this play. The information I provide here is intended to give a greater understanding to future directors of this play.

I have always been fascinated by East Asia. As a child I would watch Chinese kung-fu movies and Japanese samurai movies. After my friends introduced me to Japanese animated films, I absolutely inhaled them. I started taking kung fu-wushu classes in 2000. I continued studying martial arts by joining the Aikido club in college and learning Tai Chi under Grandmaster Xu and Master Zhang in Hefei, China.

I first traveled to China in 2003 with my kung fu-wushu school. We saw all the major tourist sites: The Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, the Shao Lin Temple, and the Terracotta Warriors. But more importantly than that, we visited lesser-known sites like E Mei Mountain and Guan Yu's temple near Luoyang, where his head is buried ("Guanlin Temple"). I got to lift Guan Yu's famous polearm: the guan dao. That was the moment I caught China fever. From then on I read every news article I could about China, made a serious effort to learn the use of chopsticks, and looked at maps of China both ancient and modern.

One of the reasons I decided to attend Appalachian State University was because of their Chinese language program. I enrolled in Chinese classes, joined the Chinese Club and did a summer study abroad trip to China in 2005. We spent one month at Suzhou University learning

Chinese language and one month traveling around China. We even got to see a special performance of Beijing Opera in Beijing! The trip was amazing and furthered my love of the culture, people, and language of China. Just one semester after that, I elected to do a study abroad for an entire semester at Suzhou University, Jiangsu province.

The teachers were very well qualified at Suzhou University and I had a great time learning there. You could learn something in the morning and then walk right off campus and use it! One of my conversational Chinese class's final exam requirements was to recite a short memorized Li Bai poem from the *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems*. While learning Chinese, I met a very nice girl named Anne, who taught tai chi and kung fu. I jumped at the chance to take more lessons. We went to see a performance of *The Legend of Whitesnake* at the Kun Qu Theatre Museum in Suzhou. She gave me my first Chinese and English dual language version of *The Art of War*. Eventually we fell in love but were separated by my need to return to Appalachian State for my senior year in college and her graduation from Suzhou University. Two days after I graduated in May of 2007 I was on a plane back to China. I had decided to get a job teaching English in a university in Hefei, China, Anne's hometown.

I taught conversational English to graduate students for a year in Hefei. During that time I continued my study of Chinese language. I also read *The Dao*, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and *Journey to the West*, besides watching various TV shows based on the stories of Judge Bao, *The Outlaws of the Marsh* and other Chinese books. I remember debating the merits of Liu Bei versus Cao Cao with Chinese teachers Anne and I met on a train.

Eventually Anne and I got married and we moved back to Suzhou. I got a job teaching English at a few private schools and enrolled as an independent student at Suzhou University. I took the Test of Chinese Fluency, abbreviated to HSK in Chinese, in 2009 and achieved a level

five intermediate fluency level. During this time I made a personal study of Chinese history and Beijing Opera.

Eventually we moved back to America and I got a job teaching Chinese in a private school. This was a new challenge for me. How do I educate these kids about Chinese culture? I came up with many different interesting ways using my theatre training and Chinese background. The project I am most proud of was one based on the *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems*. I required my advanced Chinese students to memorize several short poems in both English and Chinese, then to perform them as a group in front of the class.

After only one year of teaching Chinese, I decided to enter the Theatre Studies MA program at UCF. I got a new job teaching Chinese online part time to free up time I needed to study. In my first class at UCF I started thinking about the lack of shared cultural knowledge between China and America. Could I use theatre as a way for bridging the gap? I continued to ponder this throughout my classes at UCF and finally settled on the idea of writing and directing a play about China as my thesis project.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PLAY

Introduction to All of Chinese Literature Condensed

The following is the final version of the play I wrote as a component of this thesis. The first complete edition of the play was over two hours and forty minutes long. I held three separate readings of the play by actors in order to hear the words I wrote performed. Over a seven month long revision process the script was refined and pared down to its current form below. Enjoy.

All of Chinese Literature Condensed

Throughout the play actors should use their own names in place of character names. In general the director should feel free to modify the script to reflect any particular physical features of the actors e.g. bald, big nose, change “he” to “she” etc...

Characters:

Andria/ Actor 1- Scholarly, the smart one of the bunch.

Alex/ Actor 2- Speaks Chinese and has spent time in China.

Ahmed/ Actor 3- The “frat boy,” a little ignorant.

Justin/ Actor 4- The younger one.

Note on the Chinese: All Chinese words used in this work come from the official Mandarin dialect and they are Romanized according to the rules of Chinese Pinyin and should be pronounced as such (Fei is pronounced Fay, Kao is pronounced Cow, etc...). The actor playing Actor 2/Alex should know some Chinese or be coached by a Mandarin speaker. If there is a choice, the character of Alex should be Chinese-American.

ACT I

The set is simple in design, it is up to the performers to make it “come alive.” Two 1’x1’ acting blocks, one table, a small bookcase for props, and two chairs can be arranged to create all the needed locations. A large projection screen dominates the upstage area and is used throughout to give background information, show maps, and create the scene.

At Rise: The projection screen is showing a large map of China. The bookcase and chairs are arranged upstage flanking the table. The blocks are stacked next to the chairs.

Pre-show sound: Cool mix-up/mash-up music plays to get the audience really pumped up about the show, something dancyish.

(Andria, Alex, Ahmed and Justin all enter from backstage one minute before the show is supposed to start arguing about the play. The actors wear simple solid color tops and jeans or khaki pants with sneakers. Alex carries a pile of papers. General ad libs. Andria thinks it needs more history, Alex thinks it needs more Chinese language, Ahmed thinks it needs more comedy, and Justin thinks it needs more strong female characters.)

Andria

OK well whatever, we are past due to start anyway. (to the ushers) Is everyone in? Everyone here who needs to be here? No late patrons? If they aren't here now then they can't come in.

Ahmed

(to Andria) This is our first performance, we need everyone we can get.

Andria

(to usher) Great! So if someone is late, just show them in. No biggie.

Alex

(to audience) Ni Hao! Ready to start the show? (audience reaction) Is House Left ready to start the show? (reaction from HL)

Justin

Is House Right ready to start the show? (reaction from HR)

Ahmed

Is House Center ready to start the show? (reaction from HC)

Andria

Balcony, are you ready to start the show?

Ahmed

Who are you kidding? We don't play in large enough theatres to have a balcony.

Andria

I'm keeping it in the script just in case we do.

Alex

Are *we* ready to start the show? (Actors react negatively)

Justin

We're not actually ready to start the show.

Alex

Why? I gave you the final copy of the script this morning. I got the extra copy right here. (waves papers in his hand) What's the problem?

Justin

Professional actors usually have a solid two weeks to rehearse a new script. I can't perform like this.

Andria

(to Ahmed) He called us actors.

Ahmed

(to Andria) He called us professional.

Andria

We're getting paid.

Ahmed

You're getting paid? Real money?

Andria

I'm getting paid in Cool Ranch Doritos, which is better than real money.

Ahmed

You can't claim to be professional if you're getting paid in chips!

Justin

If you deal blackjack in Vegas you can! (the argument devolves as the whole cast ad libs)

Alex

Stop guys! STOP! (pause, the cast realizes this is happening in front of a paying audience) Yes, audience if you couldn't tell from the moment you walked in the room, we are still working out the kinks of this little play. (shows papers) To quote Bob Ross, "There are no mistakes, only happy accidents." So we are giving you the *opportunity* to experience "Theatre Verité" here tonight.

Ahmed

A fancy name for making it up on the spot.

Andria

Exactly! No extra cost! Let's introduce ourselves. Spotlights?

Alex

Right here. (Alex and the others produce flashlights and notecards) And the introduction cards.

Andria

Wow. “Theatre Verité” indeed. (to booth) Sound guy? Can we get the music? (Sound: slightly menacing introduction music plays) Ok then! (Andria strikes a pose. All shine their flashlights on Andria)

Alex

(in a powerful voice, reading from card) This is Andria. She enjoys books, reading, reading books and has recently begun writing. (Andria breaks his pose. All shine their lights on Alex)

Justin

(in a powerful voice, reading from card) This is Alex. He spent a few years in China and is fluent in Chinese, though you wouldn’t know that from looking at him. (beat) He likes basketball, classic rock, and girls. (Alex breaks his pose. All shine their lights on Ahmed)

Andria

(in a powerful voice, reading from card) This is Ahmed. He loves fantasy football and video games. And he likes chicks too! So don’t get any ideas. (Ahmed breaks his pose. All shine their lights on Justin)

Ahmed

(in a powerful voice) This is Justin. He is a powerful wizard from the future and part-time nudist. When not volunteering at the animal shelter, he enjoys cooking with his wizard magic. (Justin breaks his pose. Music stops)

Justin

That was almost completely inaccurate information about me.

Alex

You mean you don’t volunteer?

Justin

No.

Ahmed

Yeah man, I don’t know. I just read the card.

Alex

What we have attempted to do with this play is reduce all the most important Chinese works of literature into a warm, flavorful, slightly spicy, stew of knowledge. We will then spoon-feed it to you, our audience, with the requisite “airplane going into the hangar” sounds. (Alex demonstrates) Why do we do this? Because, the majority of you are Americans and, in the big picture, America is a baby of a country on the world stage.

Ahmed

Hey! We Americans are not babies! We have over 300 years of history in this country! We built the Empire State Building! We landed on the moon! We created Coca-Cola!

Alex

Justin, can you settle him down? (Justin crosses to Ahmed)

Andria

We researched this work for *literally hours* because only one of the four of us had ever been to China. The closest I ever got was getting lost in San Francisco's Chinatown. And now for our first book! (looks at Alex's script) ...Oh! The first of the four classical Chinese novels!

Justin

All the fiction lovers rejoice! (Justin exits)

The Romance of The Three Kingdoms

Alex

(walks downstage, projection: *The Romance of The Three Kingdoms*) "They say the momentum of history was ever thus: the empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide." Author Luo Guan Zhong opens *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* with this famous phrase.

Andria

The empire was the Han dynasty, and it divided in 220 AD. Ambitious warlords and petty criminals caused chaos to reign throughout the land. Righteous heroes rose up trying to re-unite China and bring an end to the disorder. And here to explain everything about Third Century Chinese military-political fiction is Ahmed!

Ahmed

Though I haven't read the book or know much about history, or even really understand that first quote, I am the undisputed expert on this work.

Andria

Yeah I wondered why you chose this book. Did *Maxim* do a cover story on Chinese novels?

Ahmed

No. I played *Dynasty Warriors Two* through *Seven*. (beat) *Six* is the best (beat) But just like *Dynasty Warriors* we will highlight the best, most exciting parts of our subject matter and eliminate the wasteful or boring parts. Let's examine the name of this work: *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. (Projection: map of the three kingdoms) There are three kingdoms: Wei, Wu and Shu. (Justin enters in traditional Chinese female garb: Cheongsam, hair, etc.) And there is some romance in the work, however it's not like a grocery store romance novel or anything.

Justin

What? But you said... Why am I in this costume, then? (Justin exits)

Ahmed

It's actually an action-adventure novel with scenes of manly men discussing big ideas like politics, battle plans, drinking, and alliances. (thinks) I guess you could say it's less of a Romance and more of a Bromance. In typical frat-boy style the story starts with three men

drinking outdoors. (Projection: Peach Garden) Liu Bei, (Andria enters as Liu Bei in a white robe) a distant relative of the Han dynasty emperor. Zhang Fei, (Alex enters as Zhang Fei with turban and beard) a butcher and drunkard with a temper. And Guan Yu, (Ahmed puts on a beard and green robe to become Guan Yu) a mighty man with an impressive beard known for his battle prowess.

Alex

(as Zhang Fei) Sweet Peach Garden you got here, bro! I bet the ladies dig it. Where's the brewskis, Liu Bei?

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) Yeah! I worked up a mighty thirst riding over here.

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Bros, I have gathered you here to discuss the not-cool state of our country. (hands out PBR cans)

Alex

(as Zhang Fei) Agreed! I haven't been able to sell much meat since the troubles began. It's been working me into a mighty rage!

Andria

(as Liu Bei) I've heard through the imperial grapevine that the country is breaking apart due to internal corruption and lax management!

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) Yeah. And what's with this new frat that is trying to weasel its way in, the Yellow Turbans? I heard they don't even drink!

Ahmed, Andria, Alex

NOT COOL! (all take long pulls of their beer)

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Who do they think they are, covering their heads with yellow cloth and being all "religious." They don't like to party! Anybody who doesn't like to party is in a frat for the wrong reason. They are going to regret the day they showed up!

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) By not partying and not drinking like the rest of us, they are destroying exactly what we stand for and contributing to the downfall of the Han dynasty!

Ahmed, Andria, Alex

YEAH! (all take long pulls of their beer)

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Since I'm a distant cousin of the Han emperor I want to raise some troops and put down these so-called "Yellow Turbans." Who's with me?

Alex

(as Zhang Fei, crushes his PBR can) ZHANG FEI WILL LAY WASTE TO ANYONE WHO DOESN'T LIKE TO PARTY!

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) Then we are decided. We three shall become sworn bros and strive to end the torment raging in China. We vow to fight unending and should we die, we will strive to die on the same day on the same hour as each other. This will be our Peach Garden Vow!

Ahmed, Andria, Alex

YEAH! (all drink)

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Now is our time to act!

Ahmed

(dropping character) Yeah, that'll be a change! (Andria shoots Ahmed a dirty look) But these three sworn bros weren't the only ones in China who were concerned with the state of the country. To the north a warlord rose taking the young, weak emperor under his control. His name was Cow Cow. A poet and a general, Cow Cow-

Alex

Ahmed! His name is pronounced Tsao Tsao but written C-A-O C-A-O, not Cow Cow, OK? He's a man.

Ahmed

Right, thanks! So Cao Cao (Ahmed and everyone else does the correct pronunciation for the rest of the play. Justin enters as Cao Cao in Chinese women's clothing and a general's helmet) took to the battlefield... What are you wearing? That is not what Cao Cao should wear.

Justin

Well we only had this backstage, since you tricked me with thinking this was a romance work. (thinks) You know, this could be good. Cross-gender casting is very hot in the theatre right now. Very hot!

Ahmed

But you aren't cross-gender cast. You are a man playing a man who is wearing women's clothes.

Justin

Oooh! That's even edgier!

Ahmed

(done with Justin) Great. As the three sworn bros were fighting off the Yellow Turbans... (Alex and Andria come onstage with weapons and yellow balloons. Ahmed joins them. They throw the yellow balloons in the air and flail about, “fighting” and occasionally popping the balloons)...Cao Cao rode up, leading the Emperor’s forces.

Justin

(as Cao Cao, rides up on a white hobby horse, slashing at balloons) Great work bros! We routed that rival frat! Now things can go back to normal.

Andria

(as Liu Bei) You’re Cao Cao, aren’t you?

Justin

(as Cao Cao) Guilty as charged, Bro. Now I’ve got a charge for you. (pulls out a bottle and shows it to Andria) You just got ICED!

Ahmed, Justin, Alex

OH NO!

Justin

(as Cao Cao) You know the bro code, bro!

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Fine! (kneels down and chugs the bottle)

Ahmed, Justin, Alex

Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!

Andria

(as Liu Bei, standing as he finishes) That was horrible.

Ahmed

(dropping character) The animosity between Cao Cao and Liu Bei was born. (the other actors set up for the next scene) Eventually another totally un-cool warlord named Dong Zhuo tried to take over the country. Liu Bei and Cao Cao were forced to work together to put down the usurpation.

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Take him from the right!

Justin

(as Cao Cao) Take him from the left! (they circle an invisible Ahmed/Dong Zhuo and capture him)

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Man, there sure are a lot of these bros who don’t like to party! They are screwing up the whole country! If only we had a stronger leader.

Justin

(as Cao Cao) You're right Liu Bei. I think I can handle the country better than anyone else. I'm starting my own frat and calling it Wei. Our headquarters will be in north China.

Andria

(as Liu Bei) That's crazy! You can't found your own frat! What will happen to the Han dynasty?

Justin

(as Cao Cao) Say, that Guan Yu is a strong and able fighter. Do you think he could be persuaded to join my frat?

Andria

(as Liu Bei) No way bro! Guan Yu is my sworn bro, bro! So step off, bro!

Justin

(as Cao Cao) Hey, don't bro me if you don't know me. And you don't know me. (stomps off)

Andria

(as Liu Bei) I'll never submit to your rule! I vow to continue the Han dynasty myself, but call it Shu. Maybe the new name will attract new talent. (stomps off)

Ahmed

Thus the battle lines were drawn. Cao Cao stomped north to found Wei, Liu Bei headed south to found Shu. Cao Cao was a clever bro and he consolidated his strength quickly. He retained the brilliant evil strategist Sima Yi and set about looking for other fine officers to swell his ranks. (Andria enters as Sima Yi-black robe, fan)

Justin

(enters, as Cao Cao) We've got to find a way to dominate on the battlefield! Shu is going to bust my ass the next time we meet.

Andria

(as Sima Yi) Yesss...But why would they bust your ass?

Justin

(as Cao Cao) Well, they use sound strategy, (Andria nods assent) they have the element of surprise, (Andria nods assent) and they are probably not totally wasted like we are! Oh yeah!

Andria

(as Sima Yi) True dat! (Andria and Justin bro-five) But what you are forgetting is they have superior troops and generals. Take Guan Yu for example. He is a master on the battlefield, unmatched in combat. The common people are starting to call him the god of war. If he could be turned he would be a powerful ally... and great drinking partner.

Justin

(as Cao Cao) He will join us or die. Bro-five! (Andria and Justin bro-five)

Ahmed

(dropping character) Cao Cao quickly struck at Liu Bei with his army, forcing Liu Bei to flee. Guan Yu covered Liu Bei's retreat and Cao Cao finally succeeded in capturing this so-called "god of war." That's another sweet game, by the way! (Ahmed/Guan Yu crosses to Justin. Justin/Cao Cao roughly sits him in a chair)

Justin

(as Cao Cao) Salute-a-tations, bro! (salutes)

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) Let me go! You can't keep me from my sworn bros!

Justin

(as Cao Cao) I know you miss you friends but don't be so (pause) BRO-ken hearted!

Ahmed

(drops character) Oooh, That was bad.

Justin

(as Cao Cao) Look at it this way. You want to bring China under the control of one frat, just like I do. You can still achieve your goals by fighting for me. With our combined strength we can end this destructive conflict and restore order to China.

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) I am helpless at the moment. I will agree to serve you, Cao Cao. But I have one condition.

Justin

(as Cao Cao) Name it, bro.

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) If I ever find the location of my sworn bros, then I leave your service.

Justin

(as Cao Cao) Done. Welcome to Wei, bro. (goes in for a bro-five)

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) Nope. Too soon. You've got to earn it. (Drops character) Guan Yu honored his agreement with Cao Cao but quickly found Liu Bei and went to join his bro. When Cao Cao was informed that Guan Yu was fleeing, he replied:

Justin

(as Cao Cao, Projection: We are the same, we but serve a different master.) "We are the same, we but serve a different master." Now beer me, bro! (Justin exits)

Ahmed

Guan Yu was reunited with his bros in Shu. But off in the East one more frat was trying to be the premiere force for partying in the land: Wu, founded by Sun Ce. And so China was for a time embroiled in a massive Bro-off between these three kingdoms/ frats. (Andria enters as Liu Bei, Ahmed puts on a robe and steps forward as Sun Ce.)

Andria

(as Liu Bei) I don't dig your frat, bro.

Ahmed

(as Sun Ce) I don't dig your frat either, bro!

Andria

(as Liu Bei) I hate Cao Cao's frat even more, bro!

Ahmed

(as Sun Ce) I hate them too, bro!

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Well all right then, lets work together to defeat Wei then, bro!

Ahmed

(as Sun Ce) OK then, bro! Bring it in then, bro! (They Bro-hug)

Andria

(dropping character) That was a lot of bros.

Ahmed

(dropping character) Yeah tell me about it. Shu and Wu allied against Wei. (Projection: Painting of the Battle of Chi Bi) After many skirmishes and battles the allied force cornered the Wei army at Chi Bi -The Red Cliffs on the Yangtze River. Now, this is one of the most celebrated battles in all 6,000 years of Chinese history. (Projection: Another Painting of the Battle of Chi Bi) It had everything- boats, betrayal, trickery, fire, water, air, earth, heart. But we don't have the budget for any of that. We don't have the budget for this show, really, but we're hoping after we divide up the box office take we can order a pizza. So we are going to approximate it with balloons again. (Alex and Andria enter and toss balloons on the stage, Ahmed becomes Guan Yu again, Justin enters stage right.)

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) Let's take out this Wei frat!

Alex

(as Zhang Fei) I want that bro Cao Cao's head!

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Launch the fire attack! (all performers flail about, popping balloons with their fake weapons)

Justin

(as Cao Cao, from the opposite side of the stage) Totally un-cool, bros! Your fire attack has devastated my boats!

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) There he is!

Alex

(as Zhang Fei) Lets rage on him!

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Charge!

(a mass battle happens, Alex and Andria are fighting back to back, suddenly Alex whirls around and presses a bottle into Andria's hands)

Alex

(as Zhang Fei) Bro, you just got iced! (the rest of the battle screeches to a halt)

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Nooo! Aww, man. In the middle of a battle? Seriously?

Alex

(as Zhang Fei) You know the bro code, bro! You can't break our peach garden oath! (Andria grudgingly gets down on one knee and chugs the bottle)

Ahmed, Alex, Justin

Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!

Andria

(as Liu Bei, standing as she finishes) That was reprehensible. Behind you! (the battle picks up again. Andria, Ahmed, and Alex make it over to Justin)

Justin

(as Cao Cao) I am defeated. Bros, it was nice knowing ya! Peace out! (Justin exits)

Andria

(as Liu Bei) Victory!

Alex

(as Zhang Fei) We totally raged on those Wei fools!

Ahmed

(as Guan Yu) Let us celebrate with Barbecue and PBR! (dropping character) There are many, many other tales to be told from this great book, including Cao Cao capturing Guan Yu again and cutting off his head. But those are tales for another time. (Projection: The Bromance of the Three Kingdoms) And thus The Bromance of the Three Kingdoms has drawn to a close. (All actors bow, Blackout, Lights up, actors begin to take costume pieces and props off)

Justin
Cool story, bro!

Ahmed
Don't tell me you are going to keep doing that.

Justin
No way, bro!

Alex
That was an... interesting... way of presenting that, Ahmed. You do know that Chinese people read *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in order to understand history, increase their intelligence, and learn moral lessons, right?

Ahmed
Of course I knew all that. That's why they all were frat boys! You learn all that in college!

Alex
As we just saw in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, knowledge of tactics and military maneuvers was a life or death issue in ancient China. How did the bros of the Three Kingdoms learn all their clever tactics?

The Art of War

Andria
They probably all read the next book we are going to look at! It's the most widely known classical Chinese work in the west. It has been adapted for use by businesses, artists, thinkers, and the armed forces.

Justin
Is it a slinky? (beat) It's not a slinky.

Andria
Book, Justin. I said book! The armed forces should give you a clue.

Ahmed
It's *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu! It's on the curriculum for almost every military college in the world!

Justin

But if it's all about fighting and battles from some old guy in 500 BC then how is it useful in my daily life? A slinky would be better.

Ahmed

It doesn't just cover war. It covers all sorts of things like economics, politics, diplomacy, geography, even project management.

Andria

Ahmed, I didn't know you were such an expert in Sun Tzu's military classic.

Ahmed

Of course! It was the shortest book on our list. 13 chapters in 32 pages!

Andria

Oh, why don't you present this book?

Ahmed

Thank you Andria! (Ahmed moves center stage) Most educated gentlemen in China throughout history have read *The Art of War*. It's safe to assume that Cao Cao, Guan Yu, Liu Bei, and the rest all read this book as well. How else could they have put together the massive balloon battle of Chi Bi? Now let me give you some background on Sun Tzu...

Alex

Hate to interrupt, but we need to set the pronunciation record straight.

Ahmed

OK Alex.

Alex

Sun Tzu is widely known in western countries but if you said that name in China you would get blank stares. The proper way to say his name is Sun Zi. (Projection: Sun Tzu to Sun Zi) That's S-U-N Z-I but pronounced like "suwn tzuuh."

Ahmed

Sun Zi (looks to Alex, who nods at him. Projection: map of China showing the state of Qi) was raised in a military family and showed talent for the armed forces. He wrote all 13 chapters of his *The Art of War* in his home state of Qi. But he was forced to flee to the state of Wu. (Projection: map of China showing state of Wu). The king of Wu thought highly of Sun Zi and made him a general in his army, using *The Art of War* as a guide. But *The Art of War* isn't just about fighting, it has been applied successfully to almost any endeavor you can think of, from golf to SCUBA diving. Anything that can be determined to have success or need any form of leadership.

Justin

Anything?

Ahmed

Yes, anything.

Justin

How about supermodels? Could Sun Zi turn supermodels into a fearsome fighting unit?

Ahmed

Yes! He already did.

Justin

What? I don't believe you.

Ahmed

No really, if you all can help me out I'll show you. I was going to do this anyway. (Justin and Alex exit to get changed. Ahmed puts on a belt and sword. Andria puts on kingly robes and crown, pulls a chair stage right to become a throne) When Sun Zi joined Wu, King He Lu asked him to demonstrate the practicality of his book *The Art of War*. (Justin and Alex enter dressed as concubines. Ahmed puts on sunglasses and a corn cob pipe. The effect is to look like General MacArthur.)

Andria

(as He Lu) Sun Zi, I have read your thirteen chapters and have been impressed by both your family heritage and your intellectual work. Tell me, why did you write such a treatise?

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi, Projection: "Warfare is a matter of vital importance to the state; a matter of life or death, the road to either survival or to ruin. Hence it is imperative that it be studied thoroughly."
) Warfare is a matter of vital importance to the state; a matter of life or death, the road to either survival or to ruin. Hence it is imperative that it be studied thoroughly.

Andria

(as He Lu) Well spoken! Can I see a demonstration of *The Art of War*?

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi) Of course, your majesty. My book can be applied to all things. Anything that can be determined to have success or need any form of leadership.

Andria

(as He Lu) Even...women?

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi) Of course!

Andria

(as He Lu) Well then, I command you to make all 180 of my court ladies and concubines into an efficient fighting force!

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi) It will be done. (bows, drops character, Justin and Alex drift center in women's robes and wigs) Sun Zi drilled the court women in the palace green. (as Sun Zi) OK ladies, listen up.

Justin

(as concubine 1) What-ever!

Alex

(as concubine 2) This is so lame!

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi) I'm going to put you two in charge.

Justin

(as concubine 1) What? You can't do that. We're King He Lu's favorites!

Alex

(as concubine 2) I'm even more favorite-er than her!

Justin

(as concubine 1) Oh no, girlfriend!

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi) You two are the commanders, so listen up. When I call left face, you will face left. When I call right face, you will face right! March all together now! (turns to concubines and commands them with his pipe) 1-2-3-4, 2-2-3-4... (Alex and Justin half-heartedly try to march)

Alex

(as concubine 2) This is like, such a joke.

Justin

(as concubine 1) I can't believe he wants us to do this. (Justin and Alex collapse laughing on each other)

Ahmed

(dropping character) After a while Sun Zi brought all the maidens in front of King He Lu. (as Sun Zi) Your majesty, I am ready to show you what they have learned.

Andria

(as He Lu) Proceed.

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi) It will be done. (bows, turns to concubines and commands them with his pipe) Attention! Forward March! (Alex and Justin shoddily march forward a few steps) Right face! (Alex and Justin burst out laughing) Now perhaps I wasn't clear before, commanders. Left face means face left. Right face means face right!

Alex

(as concubine 2, awkwardly saluting and giggling) Yes sir!

Justin

(as concubine 1, awkwardly saluting) The commanders are in control, sir!

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi, commands them with his pipe) Forward march! Left face! (Alex and Justin again collapse over themselves laughing) Now, as commanders you have failed in your duty to lead your troops in a disciplined way. You will be executed. (Sun Zi draws his sword and “cuts off” the concubine’s heads, actually Justin and Alex throw their wigs on the ground and become other palace women) Now, we will try this again. (Ahmed commands them with his pipe. Alex and Justin move in perfect harmony) Forward march! Right face! (Alex and Justin turn right together and keep marching in place.)

Andria

(as He Lu) They are marching in perfect harmony! Surely they can also fight very well.

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi) Undoubtedly, your majesty. (bows)

Andria

(as He Lu, Projection: “Can troops be made capable of such instantaneous coordination?” “They can, for though the men of Wu and Yue hate one another, if together in a boat tossed by the wind, they could cooperate as the right hand does with the left.”) Can troops be made capable of such instantaneous coordination?

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi) They can, for though the men of Wu and Yue hate one another, if together in a boat tossed by the wind, they could cooperate as the right hand does with the left.

Andria

(as He Lu) My armies of Wu are vast. Can you lead them all as you have lead 180 of my palace women?

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi, Projection: “Generally in battle, management of a large force is the same as management of a few men. It is a matter of organization. And to direct a large force is the same as to direct a few men.”) Generally in battle, management of a large force is the same as management of a few men. It is a matter of organization. And to direct a large force is the same as to direct a few men. Or women.

Andria

(as He Lu) Then I accept you as a general.

Ahmed

(as Sun Zi) Thank you! (dropping character) And that's the story of how Sun Zi made supermodels into an ancient A-Team. (Alex, Justin, and Andria clap)

Andria

OK, Ahmed that was a great story about Sun Zi, but how about something more practical than just cutting people's heads off if they don't follow your orders.

Ahmed

What would you suggest?

Andria

Something that has been used by men for millennia to settle disputes. The thumb war!

Justin

Yeah! Could you apply *The Art of War* to war with thumbs? (wiggles his thumbs)

Ahmed

I think I got it. (looks to Alex)

Alex

Thumb war tournament! Ahmed. It's you and *The Art of War* versus Justin and Andria.

Ahmed

What are you going to do?

Alex

I will be the judge! (grabs a microphone from the bookcase)

Ahmed, Justin, Andria

Agreed! (Alex comes center stage, Ahmed and Justin face off in front of him.)

Alex

Round 1! Ahmed V.S. Justin!

Justin

You're going down, tall man!

Ahmed

Not on your life! (They lock hands together with their thumbs up)

Justin and Ahmed

One, Two, Three, Four, I declare a thumb war! (the battle begins. Justin looks like he has the upper hand, but then the world goes into slow motion. Sound: slow motion. Projection: "When an army takes up a position and confronts the enemy it has to observe and judge the enemy situation.")

Alex

When an army takes up a position and confronts the enemy it has to observe and judge the enemy situation.

Ahmed

Hmmm... (Ahmed looks at Justin and notices Justin's weight is to the front. Ahmed jerks him further to the front and pins his thumb) One, two, three, four!

Alex

Ahmed wins! (claps)

Ahmed

Ha! Small work once I remembered the wisdom of *The Art of War*. (Justin moves and Andria crosses to Ahmed)

Alex

Round 2! Ahmed V.S. Andria!

Andria

You just got lucky!

Ahmed

Sun Zi makes his own luck! (They lock hands together with their thumbs up)

Andria and Ahmed

One, Two, Three, Four, I declare a thumb war! (The battle begins. Ahmed and Andria are both being very cautious, but then the world goes into slow motion. Sound: Slow motion. Projection: "All warfare is based on deception.")

Alex

All warfare is based on deception.

Ahmed

Hmmm... (Ahmed looks at Andria and notices Andria's caution. Ahmed points downstage) Look! It's the latest iPhone!

Andria

Where? (Andria looks downstage)

Ahmed

(Ahmed pins Andria's thumb) One, two, three, four!

Alex

Ahmed wins! (claps)

Justin
That is not fair!

Ahmed
Ha! “All is fair in love and thumb war!” That wasn’t from Sun Zi, if you are taking notes.

Alex
Ahmed, that was amazing! What is the secret to your success? (points mic at Ahmed)

Ahmed
(Projection: “Know the enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered. Know the ground, know the weather; your victory will then be complete.”) Know the enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered. Know the ground, know the weather; your victory will then be complete. (Blackout, Lights up, actors begin to take costume pieces and props off)

Justin
Hey, Alex. I’m starting to think that Chinese literature only deals with wars and fighting. Wars during the Three Kingdoms, *The Art of War*... Wasn’t there an anti-war movement in China?

Alex
Good point Justin. I don’t want the audience to get the wrong idea. China has a turbulent past, filled with conflict and strife. But one advantage that China had over Europe was that it was spared the plague of religious wars. Religion in China arose as refuge from those conflicts. In fact, our next book deals with just that!

Dao De Jing

Andria
Lao Tzu’s book, *The Tao* or *The Tao Te Ching*, led to the creation of Taoism. (pause, to others) Imagine that? This religion focused on maintaining balance and respect for the natural order of life.

Justin
Right on! Increase the peace, man!

Alex
Also we get one of the most recognizable icons of Chinese culture. The Tai Ji Tu. (Projection: Image of the Tai Ji Tu)

Ahmed
Hey! That’s the Yin-Yang symbol.

Alex

That's a common misconception, Ahmed. It does represent opposing forces of Yin and Yang, but in Chinese it's called a Tai Ji Tu. Not to be confused with the Tai Ji-Tutu. Those are used for Taoist ballets. They are very Avant-Garde. (Ahmed and Justin are unsure) That was a joke.

Justin and Ahmed
OH! Oh!

Alex
Now, let me correct something else. (Hands out one set of papers with Taoism, *The Tao*, and *Tao Te Ching* written on them to Ahmed, Andria and Justin. Projection: The Tao to The Dao) Taoism, *The Tao*, and *Tao Te Ching* are exactly the same as (Hands out another set of papers with Daosim, *The Dao*, and *Dao De Jing* to Ahmed, Andria and Justin.) Daosim, *The Dao*, and *Dao De Jing*. The only thing that changed was the pronunciation. The modern system of pronunciation is called Pinyin. (Alex holds up a paper with "Pinyin" written on it)

Ahmed
Yeah, yeah. Tomato, Domato. Got it. Don't test me on this though.

Andria
There will be a test. The state of (state where play is being performed) will not give us funding for this play if we don't have a standardized test in it.

Alex
Oh! Lao Tzu's name got changed in the move to Pinyin as well. (flips paper over to reveal "Lao Zi") It's now pronounced Lao Zi. Same guy though.

Ahmed
(to audience) Start taking notes, people.

Andria
So Lao Zi (checks pronunciation with Alex) lived during the "Spring and Autumn" period of Chinese history, before the Three Kingdoms. (Andria collects papers from all and clears them)

Ahmed
While Confucius saw education, and witty jokes, as the path to peace, Lao Zi believed that nature should work in harmony with humans. (Andria exits)

Alex
People should be as the Tai Ji Tu-(Projection: Tai Ji Tu image) always changing with neither color dominating.

Justin
So Lao Zi was kind of like a hippie.

Alex

HE WAS NOT! He just thought...(thinking it over) Hmmm. No, yeah. He was kind of a hippie. And you know what hippies like more than anything else?

Ahmed

Leftist politics and flowers?

Alex

No. Beat poetry. (Alex, Ahmed, and Justin put on tie died bandanas and colored glasses. Alex gets a drum from the bookcase) Ladies and gentlemen, dudes and dudettes. It is my pleasure to present to you, direct from his posting as royal archivist, the man with the natural plan- Lao Zi. (Andria enters as Lao Zi- long black robe, white beard, but with hippie elements: tie died bandana and colored glasses. Ahmed and Justin move the acting blocks downstage to use as drums)

Andria

(as Lao Zi, to the actors and audience) Greetings, all! Thanks for gathering here tonight. We got the sky above us, the air around us, the grass below us, and the grass inside us too, man! (high-fives Ahmed) It's completely natural! Now dig, I got me a new version of my *Dao De Jing* here that I want to present to you in the grooviest way possible. Brother Alex? (Alex starts a beat on his drum, Ahmed and Justin join in.) "Who warms his body at that fire, sees nothing but its smoke, but he who puts aside desire, the flame's self may invoke./ He merits much, but does not ask. That any grant that same, he finds his pleasure in the task and fears to find it fame./ All thoughts that kindle to desire, his mind has long refused, and since he does not feed that fire his heart is unconfused." (furious drums, Andria/Lao Zi bows, all snap fingers as applause) Thank you. Thank you! Now I would love to give some of my disciples a chance. (Justin/disciple stands up, Andria/Lao Zi sits down with Justin's block)

Justin

(as disciple, Alex starts the beat again) "The valley-spirit cannot fall, because it lies so low, and yet it is the base of all, and to it all things flow./ Goodness and water are the same, in that each often runs, through lowly spots, unknown to fame, which the self-seeker shuns./ Who loves the people he would lead, will not proclaim his power, but act and quicken them and feed, as heaven feeds the flower." (furious drums. Justin/disciple bows, all snap fingers as applause) Thank you, thank you! (Ahmed stands up, Justin sits down with Ahmed's block)

Ahmed

(as disciple, to Alex) Yo, kick it! (Alex starts a hip-hop beat, the other join in. Ahmed raps the following) "Who would be wise in word and deed, and free from sensual strife, permits each sense to serve his need, but not to rule his life./ We cannot analyze this thought-, the mysteries that blend, in the beginning there was naught, and shall be at the end./ The ancient masters those of yore, were subtle and profound, how few can understand their lore which I strive to expound." (furious drums. Ahmed bows, all snap fingers as applause. Blackout, Lights up, actors begin to take costume pieces and props off.)

Alex

And that was *The Dao*. Live simply as individuals and promote peace between all. This was quite popular among the common people, but not so popular among the ruling class.

Andria

Most of the dynasties that ruled China suppressed Daoism and praised Confucianism because Confucianism reinforced imperial power. But during the artistic and nature-loving Tang dynasty Daoism became the official religion. Maybe that's why they wrote so many poems?

Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems

Alex

Hey Ahmed, who is your favorite drunk?

Ahmed

Hmmm. Probably Norm from "Cheers."

Alex

Mine is my grandpa. But Li Bai is China's favorite drunk. And he's a poet. In fact most people consider him the greatest Chinese poet who ever lived. Like Edgar Allen Poe, but happier.

Andria

The second greatest Chinese poet who ever lived, Du Fu, was Li Bai's contemporary and friend. They lived during the rich Tang Dynasty, between 618 and 906 AD. (Projection: The Tang Dynasty: China's Golden Age 618-906AD) Considered China's golden age.

Alex

Du Fu and Li Bai's most famous works are collected in a book titled *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems*. You can find it on almost every bookshelf in China.

Ahmed

(quickly cuts him off) Great, Alex, but *I* cannot -and I'm sure our audience will be with me on this as well- sit through an evening of poetry reading. We just got through *The Dao*!

Alex

We were going to perform...

Ahmed

OK. Alex, you play Li Bai because you drink the most. (crosses to Justin) And Justin can play Du Fu because you are a starving artist.

Justin

Uuuuh...

Ahmed

Great! Both of you get into costume. (Alex and Justin exit) Du Fu was known for his poems about war and Li Bai was known for his poems about drinking.

Andria

Li Bai was the number one pop star of the Tang dynasty.

Ahmed

Du Fu, on the other hand didn't want to be a poet at all. He tried to pass the imperial examination to get an official job but failed. He became so poor his children died of starvation. Just let that sink in. (pause) But first Li Bai. (Alex enters as Li Bai: sunglasses, long white gown, wine glass, scroll. He is drunk and wanders the stage while speaking)

Alex

(as Li Bai) "Solitude" (Projection: "Solitude" and imagery from the poem) I'm drunk with wine/ and moonshine/ with flowers fallen o'er the ground/ and o'er me blue-gowned/ sobered, I stroll along the stream/ whose ripples gleam/ I see no bird/ and hear no word. (Justin enters as Du Fu: ragged robe, scroll. He crosses to Li Bai) Du Fu! So nice to see you buddy! How have you been?

Justin

(as Du Fu) Li Bai! Bad. I finally got my civil service job, but then got fired.

Alex

(as Li Bai) Bummer Duffie. Let me cheer you up. "Parting at a Tavern in Jinling" (Projection: "Parting at a Tavern in Jinling" and imagery from the poem) The tavern's sweetened when wind blows in willow-down/ A southern maiden urges guests to taste her wine/ My dear young friends have come to see me leave the town/ They who stay drink their cups and I who leave drink mine/ O ask the river flowing to the east, I pray/ Whether its parting grief or mine will longer stay.

Justin

(as Du Fu) Oh. That's good! "parting grief or mine will longer stay."

Alex

(as Li Bai) Do you have anything you have been working on? Let's hear it!

Justin

(as Du Fu) I do have one little piece. "Song of the Frontier" (Projection: "Song of the Frontier" and imagery from the poem) The bow you carry should be strong/ The arrows you use should be long/ Before a horseman, shoot his horse/ Capture the chief to beat his force!/ Slaughter shan't go beyond its sphere/ Each State should guard its own frontier/ If an invasion is repelled/ Why shed more blood unless compelled?

Alex

(as Li Bai, claps) I love it. But I can see why the emperor fired you. I told you to stay away from that political stuff. (drunkenly thumbs through his scroll) Here's one I wrote to you, Du Fu. (bows to Justin) "Joking with Du Fu" (Projection: "Joking with Du Fu" and imagery from the poem) On top of a hill of boiled rice I met with Du Fu/ Who in the noonday sun wore a hat of bamboo/ Pray, how could you have grown so thin since we did part?/ Is it because the verse-composing wrung your heart? Ha ha ha.

Justin

(as Du Fu) Ha ha ha. Did you write that the last time you were sober? Two weeks ago? Here is a poem I wrote to you titled “Eight Immortal Drinkers.” (Projection: “Eight Immortal Drinkers” and imagery from the poem) Li Bai could turn sweet nectar into verses fine/ Drunk in the capital, he’d lie in shops of wine/ Even imperial summons proudly he’d decline/ Saying immortals could not leave the drink divine.

Alex

(as Li Bai) Too true, Too true! You know me well Dufie!

Ahmed

(Alex/Li Bai exits) Li Bai left his friend. He met his end falling into a river, drunk, attempting to catch the reflection of the moon in his wineglass.

Justin

(as Du Fu) “Dreaming of Li Bai” (Projection: “Dreaming of Li Bai” and imagery from the poem) We stifle sobs on parting with the dead/ On parting with the living, tears are shed/ You’re exiled to the miasmic Southern shore/ How can you not send us news anymore?/ Last night you came into my dream anew/ This shows how long I am thinking of you/ Now you are caught in a net and bound with strings/ How can you free yourself with bound-up wings?/ I fear it was not your soul I did dream./ Could it go such long way o’er mountain and stream?/ When it came, green could maple forests loom/ When it went, dark mountains were left in gloom/ The setting moon on rafters sheds its light/ I seem to see your beaming face as bright/ O monstrous billows where water is deep/ Don’t wake up monsters and dragons asleep.

Alex

(enters as Li Bai, in spirit form) Just one more poem. Many consider it my most famous poem: “Thoughts on a Tranquil Night” (Projection: “Thoughts on a Tranquil Night” and imagery from the poem) Before my bed a pool of light/ Can it be dew frost on the ground?/ Looking up, I find the moon bright/ Bowing, in homesickness I’m drowned. (Blackout , Lights up, actors begin to take costume pieces and props off. Ahmed and Andria enter)

Ahmed

(wiping tears) Wow. I didn’t think it would get that emotional.

Alex

(taking off his costume) Thousand year old poetry can be very powerful.

Ahmed

So what else happened in the Tang dynasty to make it China’s golden age? Besides the awesome poems about war and drinking.

Andria

The Tang dynasty afforded many rights to women, was very culturally rich, and surprisingly religiously tolerant. We discussed Daoisim earlier but the Tang dynasty was also a golden age

for that popular Indian religion...(blank stares from the other three) Buddhism! In fact our next book is both a story about Buddhism and an allegory for one's own journey to nirvana.

Justin

Aww sweet! I love grunge metal!

Journey to the West

Andria

What? No! Number two of the four classic Chinese novels is *Journey to the West*. (Projection: *Journey to the West*. Andria crosses up stage and picks up a heavy book from the table)

Alex

I loved watching the cartoons based on this book. They play on Chinese TV constantly.

Ahmed

Oh yeah! I loved watching them too. *Dragonball Z* is the best!

Alex

What are you talking about?

Ahmed

What? You didn't know? The Japanese cartoon series *Dragonball Z* is based on the Chinese book *Journey to the West*. I thought you knew that.

Alex

Huh. This book, like all four of the classical Chinese novels, is based on real events but fictionalized into a perennially popular novel. It combines elements from Buddhism, Daoism, and traditional Chinese folk myths. Make sure your imagination is fully operational before we take you on this fantastic journey!

Andria

For those of you who are familiar with Chinese novels, like me, *Journey to the West* follows the structure where the chapters are summarized in the table of contents. And, let me tell you, the table of contents for this book was hilarious. (The others stare at Andria) I could just read it off to you. (starts to open the book)

Ahmed

Now this goes far beyond even the outer limits of being a geek, Andria. You can't read a table of contents to the audience.

Andria

No, really this is good stuff, just listen. (Ahmed backs down) Part 1: Monkey Valiant. Chapter 1: In which Monkey bursts out of the stone egg, dares the leap through the Water Curtain, and establishes a Cave-Dwelling for his people. Monkey, seeking immortality, becomes a pupil of the Patriarch Subodhi, and is given the Buddhist name, 'Aware-of-Vacuity.'

Alex
“Vacuity?”

Andria
The state of being vacuous, like the inside of your head. (pause) Empty.

Alex
Let me see that. (takes book, reads) Hey this is already all summarized for us!

Ahmed
We don’t have to do any more work? (Ahmed and Alex crowd the book)

Andria
(as Justin joins Ahmed and Alex) Well, there are some places we could tighten up the summary.

Justin
Great! We’ll summarize the summary! Brilliant! We should have done this with all the other books!

Alex
Let’s perform the heck out of this! (The actors set up to act out the scenes as they are read aloud. Andria takes the role of Monkey King, the rest of the actors play the other roles. Projection: *Journey to the West, Condensed* Part I: Monkey Valiant) Chapters 2 and 3: Blah blah, Monkey teaches his companions Mock Warfare, but he soon secures real weapons by demanding gifts of the Dragon of the Eastern Sea. He is given an iron staff which can shrink or grow at his will- (Ahmed and Justin burst out laughing).

Ahmed
Oh yeah, I got one of those.

Justin
Me too! (they high five).

Alex
Real mature gentlemen! (returns to reading) hmm... with which he vanquishes the Messengers of Death. The Jade Emperor then offers him an official post in Heaven to keep him out of further mischief.

Justin
Oh, like being Vice-President.

Alex
And the rest: Monkey, by eating the heavenly peaches, acquires three new magics and defies arrest until finally he is baked in a crucible. But emerges whole with fiery eyes. So the Big Buddha imprisons Monkey in the Mountain of the Five Elements until he should repent and learn

humility. This is the end of the first part. Ahmed? (Justin joins the cast acting things out as Tang San Zang, Ahmed crosses to the book and reads)

Ahmed

Part II: Tripitaka Chosen (Projection: *Journey to the West, Condensed* Part II: Tripitaka Chosen). tells about the holy Buddhist monk Tripitaka, or Tang San Zang. The Dragon King screws around with the weather, the Emperor is killed by ghosts, and a young priest named Tang San Zang returns to his temple. Then the King of Death restores the Emperor to life in exchange for some melon seeds, like you do. Anyway, the important part of this whole section is that Tang San Zang is chosen by the Goddess of Mercy, Guan Yin for the long and dangerous journey to India to find the Buddhist scriptures. Thus ends Part II.

Alex

Now Part III: Heroic Journey (Projection: *Journey to the West, Condensed* Part III: Heroic Journey) is the actual journey from China west into India, thus the name *Journey to the West*. (Andria becomes Sun Wu Kong. Justin becomes Tang San Zang.)

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) I set off alone on my journey, with nothing but my trusty white horse for company. (Projection: Mountain. Justin uses a white hobby-horse to gallop around the stage) Soon I was accosted by a strange sound coming from a mountain.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Release me! Master! Get me out of here and I'll protect you on your journey to the West.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Who is it that speaks? I am the priest sent by the Emperor on a holy mission named Tang San Zang.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) I am the Great Sage Under Heaven, the Monkey King Sun Wu Kong. I have been trapped in this mountain for 500 years by the Buddha himself. But the goddess Guan Yin told me that if I protected a pilgrim on his way West, I am to be released and forgiven my misdeeds. Let me be your disciple.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) I should be delighted, but how can I free you from the Mountain of Five Elements?

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) You have but to think me free and I will come.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Very well. (prays) If this Monkey King is worthy to be my disciple then he should be put at liberty. (sound: crashing, Andria leaps up)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Master! I am freed. I will see to your horse.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Now that you are free I must give you a Buddhist name.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) I have one already. "Aware-of-Vacuity."

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) A splendid name! (Alex enters as a Tiger)

Alex

(as Tiger) Roooooaawwwr!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Hmm. He has come to supply me with a new apron! Ha ha! (strikes Alex with his staff, the Tiger falls dead)

Alex

(as Tiger) Urrrggg!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong, Alex stands and wraps the tiger skin around Andria's waist, then exits) This will do nicely! (seeing Tang San Zang's disbelief) My magic staff can grow large or small at my command. I normally keep it in the hair behind my ear. (Andria switches her staff for a toothpick and then puts the toothpick on her ear. She holds the staff behind her back) See? Magic!

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Buddha protect us all! One should never kill.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) But the tiger would have killed you.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) A priest should be ready to die before committing an act of violence.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Well, I have killed a fair share of people in my time and I was made a Great Sage Equal of Heaven.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) You were also imprisoned in a mountain for 500 years!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong, angry) OK then. I'm off. (Andria flies off)

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) It is useless to teach such a fickle monkey. And this Sun Wu Kong is the worst of them all! I shall continue on myself. (Alex enters as Old Woman: white robe and forehead marking, he carries a circlet and short jacket)

Alex

(as Old Woman) Holy pilgrim! How is it that you travel alone on this dusty road?

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) I had a disciple, but he behaved badly and when I scolded him, he left in a huff!

Alex

(as Old Woman) Unfortunate. These clothes I carry belonged to my son who died in a monastery. I would have given them to your disciple. I will give them to you (Gives Justin the clothes) and when he returns you must make him wear them and speak this simple spell. The Scripture of the Headband. (Justin looks expectant) That's the spell. That's it. Just say that.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) The Scripture of the Headband.

Alex

(as Old Woman) Not now! When he wears it. And then he will be made obedient and will serve you on your quest.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Thank you old woman, may I...

Alex

(as Old Woman) I'm away back to heaven...(Alex flies off)

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Oh! I see it now. She was Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy in disguise! (Andria enters and crosses to Justin)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) I'm back, Master! Why are you still here?

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) I was waiting for you.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) I only went off for a cup of tea with the Dragon King.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) And you didn't think of my thirst? I have some gifts for you. Anyone who wears this headband can recite scriptures without learning them and anyone who puts on this jacket can perform ceremonies without learning them.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Oh oh! Let me put them on Master! (Andria puts on the clothes)

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) The Scripture of the Headband!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Ohhh! (grabs head) Oooh! (she tries to take off the clothes but cannot, they are stuck to her)

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) The Scripture of the Headband!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong, rolling around on the floor) Oooh! Oooooow! Who taught you this trick? The goddess Guan Yin? I'll blacken her eyes!

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) It was she that taught me the spell. Fighting her would be useless.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong, standing) It's too much for me. I'll come to India and promise to be your disciple. (Andria and Justin circle the stage. Ahmed enters)

Ahmed

Later on that evening they saw a group of houses in the distance and decided to rest.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Master! I'll go ahead and get us lodging. (Ahmed becomes Kao: stick, wispy beard, robe)

Ahmed

(as Kao, sees Andria) Ohhhhhh no! Isn't it enough that I have a monster as a son-in-law. Why does another beast come to my farm?

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Peace, old man. You've lived a long time to learn little wisdom, if you only judge people by appearances.

Ahmed

(as Kao) I am Kao and this is my farm! (starts crying)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Come now, why are you crying? I don't mind dealing with any monsters that are about, just to pass the time.

Ahmed

(as Kao) I had three daughters and wanted the youngest to be married and stay on here at the farm with me. Three years ago a nice looking man came named Pigsy. He was strong and hard working in the fields. Just the son-in-law that I would want. But over time his appearance changed. His nose grew snout-like, his ears got floppy, and he had an enormous appetite.

Andria

(dropping character, to audience) Oh, all men are like that after the wedding. Am I right ladies?

Ahmed

(as Kao) He has taken my daughter to the barn and locked her in. I haven't heard from her in six months!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) No problem. I'll defeat this Pig Head and save your daughter! A little piece of work for my staff! (takes the toothpick from behind her ear and switches it with the full-sized staff. Andria runs off and mimes beating down the barn door and saving the girl) Now I'll play a little trick on that piggy. I'll change into the very image of his girl. (Andria puts on a female robe and becomes the girl. She remains turned away from Alex. Alex enters as Zhu Ba Jie, big belly, piggy ears, and nose. He carries a rake on his shoulder)

Andria

(as Girl, makes a loud sigh) I am despairing.

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) What are you groaning about? Have I not done all I said I would? Given you clothes and food?

Andria

(as Girl) Not that, my father yelled to me through the barn. He says you are ugly and dumb and nobody knows anything about you.

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) That's no mystery. I'm called Pigsy! Properly named Zhu Ba Jie.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) They are looking for a Great Sage to drive you away.

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie, scared) If that's so, then I'm off this minute! (makes to leave)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong, takes off the female robe and turns around to resume his normal form) You fool! Can't you see that I am he?

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) What? (they fight, Zhu Ba Jie's rake matched evenly with Sun Wu Kong's staff.)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Ha ha, come on now hit me. (Andria presents her head, Alex hits it to no effect) Don't you know I was unkillable even to the gods? They put me in a fire but that only gave me fiery eyes!

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) How can that be? (examines his rake) This rake was given to me by the Jade Emperor himself.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong, realizing) You used to be a general in heaven, with command over the watery troops! Now you have been cast to earth for some offence, correct?

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) Yes, I've been banished here in this form and told to wait for a pilgrim going to India. The Goddess Guan Yin told me.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Ho ho ho! I am escorting that very pilgrim now!

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie, groveling) Oh pleeeeee, pleeeeee take me to him.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Very well. (Alex and Andria cross to Ahmed and Justin)

Ahmed

(as Kao) Monkey King! Thank you for saving my daughter and...(sees Zhu Ba Jie) You beast! How dare you treat my daughter that way!

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) Ungrateful man! How dare you treat your son-in-law this way!

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Calm heads must prevail. Pigsy, Zhu Ba Jie, I accept you as one of my disciples. We leave in the morning. (Alex bows to Justin)

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie, to Kao) See that you take care of my wife. I'll be back when I'm done taking him to India! (Andria, Justin and Alex circle the stage. Ahmed drops character)

Ahmed

The three set out on their journey and were making good time. Summer had passed and autumn had come. They reached an impasse at the River of Flowing Sands. (Projection: large river, Ahmed exits)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Master! The river is wide and the waves tall. We cannot cross. Well, I can fly across on my cloud but Pigsy and you cannot.

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) Ha! What would you know of water? I once commanded the.... (Ahmed charges the group as Sha Wu Jing- robe, necklace, beard, monk's spade. Andria takes Justin to safety. Alex fights with Ahmed)

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing) Raaaaaahhhh!

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) Woah! You're an ugly one! Hey Monkey, help ole Pigsy out. (Andria joins Alex and Ahmed in combat. Ahmed retreats into the water. Andria stops when reaching the edge of the water)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) I cannot go further. The wind and sky are my domains! Pigsy, remember your water magic!

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie, going after Ahmed) Haha, I would never forget that.

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing, confronting Alex underwater) Now then, pink-skin. I am surprised you did not recognize me. I was once the Curtain-Raising General in heaven, but because I broke a vase the Jade Emperor cast me out. When I am hungry I eat human flesh. But yours looks even more appetizing!

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) Ha! Chopped up and braised in brown sauce I would make a meal fit for a king! But I've no time to talk with you. I need to secure passage across this river for a pilgrim monk to India.

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing, drops his guard) Why didn't you say so? I wouldn't have fought you if you said you were seeking the holy scriptures! (Ahmed and Alex come out of the river and cross to Justin

and Andria. Ahmed bows to Justin) Tripitaka, how have I been so blind as to not recognize you? Forgive me all my rudeness! I am called Sandy in my earthly form but once I was a general in heaven.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) So this filthy creature is named Sandy. And he is also charged by the Goddess Guan Yin to redeem himself by protecting our Master!

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Do you wish to be a priest in our religion?

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing) I do. I promise to protect and keep you.

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Now then I will give you your Buddhist name: Sha Wu Jing.

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing, rises, greets Alex and Justin) Brother!

Andria and Alex

(as Sun Wu Kong and Zhu Ba Jie) Brother!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Be quick about your boat work! And make sure to take the luggage and horse on board as well. (Ahmed mimes a boat and takes the group across the river. The group travels onwards.)

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Let us halt. I have need to rest and we four should talk. (all gather in a semi-circle) We have gathered here to find the holy scriptures from India and end the threat to Buddhism. As the Big Buddha and Goddess of Mercy in Heaven have ordained each of us to this task for our salvation.

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing) One does not simply walk into India! (pause, all look at Ahmed) You know, there's the whole Himalayan mountains in the way. It is a cold and barren wasteland. The very air you breathe is a poisonous fume. Pure evil will block us.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) No human could help us in this journey. My abilities far surpass yours...(continues arguing)

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) Come now, I was a general in heaven. The Jade Emperor gave me this mighty rake! (continues arguing)

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing) You fools have no idea of the difficulties ahead. I know this land well...
(Ahmed, Andria, and Alex are all arguing)

Justin

(as Tang San Zang, Loudly) I will take the scriptures from India! (silence) Though I do not know the way. (pause)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) If by my life or by my death I can help you, I will. You have my staff (holds staff aloft)

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing) And my monk's spade! (holds monk's spade aloft)

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) And my rake! (holds rake aloft)

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) Thus The Fellowship of the Monk is formed. (The actors all make a heroic pose. Projection: The Fellowship of the Monk, Sound: music very close to the theme from The Lord of the Rings. Justin breaks character) The Fellowship journeyed onwards to the West, passing many strange sights and defeating many evil monsters. (Projection: path from Xi'an, China into northern India through the Himalayas. Ahmed and Alex exit) They even restored a murdered king back to life and to his rightful throne! After many long weeks of travel they arrived at the outskirts of a city. (Projection: outside the walls of an ancient Chinese city, as Tang San Zang) I tire and will need a rest.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Master, sit down here. I will scout ahead. (Monkey leaps into the air and flies on his cloud) What is this I see? (Alex enters as a Buddhist slave and mimes building a temple. Ahmed enters wearing the Daoist/hippie outfit) Buddhist priests slaving in the sun, dragging bricks and timbers behind them! They are building a temple! But no! A Daoist priest is overseeing the slaves!

Ahmed

(breaks character) OK I know what you are thinking: why are Daoists enslaving Buddhists? Didn't they just tell us Daoists believe in personal freedom and China never suffered from extensive religious wars? Well, you're right. But this is directly from the novel. A mythologically-based fantasy novel with a pig-man and magical flying monkey. Just go with it! (resumes character)

Andria

Aha! This must be the city I have heard of where the religion of Buddha has been destroyed. I'll free these slaves! (Andria flies toward Alex) For some reason you have all become Buddhist slaves! Why are you working as servants rather than reading your prayer books?

Alex

(as Buddhist Slave) Don't mock us! The king has taken to Daoism and cast us out. We now labor as slaves for the Daoists in the city.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) I'll put this right with my iron staff! (as before, Andria switches her toothpick for her staff, then flies to Ahmed.)

Ahmed

(as Daoist Priest #1) Woah! Trippy. A flying monkey!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) I have come looking for some kinsmen of mine but have found a 500 strong family of Buddhists toiling to build a Daoist temple!

Ahmed

(as Daoist Priest #1) Yeah, man. Money isn't everything...so we made slaves to work for us. Slaves work for free! I'm like a super-genius!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong, Andria mimes bopping Ahmed on the head and flies back to the Buddhists) Ho ho! You look upon your savior. (Andria switches her toothpick for her staff)

Alex

(as Buddhist Slave) Our savior? You are a murderer! We will know our savior when he presents himself. The Goddess Guan Yin told us what he looks like: Bright fiery eyes, hairy cheeks, a round head and a flat forehead. Oh! I am blinded by exhaustion? You are our savior!

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Ha ha. Now go, hide! You are free.

Alex

(as Buddhist Slave) Thank you savior. Please free our brothers in the city and set the King back on the correct path. (Andria flies back to Justin)

Justin

(as Tang San Zang) We shall spend the night here. (Ahmed and Alex enter as Sha Wu Jing and Zhu Ba Jie. All go to sleep. Sound: hippie music)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong, wakes) What is this? A celebration? (Projection: above an ancient Chinese city. Andria flies above the city and looks down) Oh! The Daoists have made offerings of many

foods at their temple! And there are great clouds of...incense being burned in the temple. This will be the perfect chance to play a trick on them! (laughs and flies back to the group) Hey, hey, hey! Pigsy, Sandy wake up and share the fun! (Ahmed wakes, Alex still sleeps)

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing) What? Who wants fun in the middle of the night?

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong, in Alex's ear) The Daoist temple is littered with delectable offerings: dumpling, cakes, sweet meats, fruits...

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie, waking with a snort immediately) Brother, you weren't thinking of leaving me out of this! (Ahmed, Andria, and Alex fly off to the Daoist temple. Justin exits. Projection: Daoist temple. Sound continues) Mmmmm food!

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing) STOP! They are all praying. We'd be discovered for sure.

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) I'll see to that! (Andria draws a pattern on the ground with her stick and then blows the air. Sound: huge wind, things crashing and people yelling while fleeing) Ho ho! That put them at flight! (Alex, Ahmed and Andria step inside the temple)

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie) Now it's time for food!

Ahmed

(as Sha Wu Jing) Mind your manners! We will sit down first! (Ahmed, Andria and Alex sit at the table and mime eating a feast. Justin enters as Daoist Priest #2 with hippie clothes)

Justin

(as Daoist Priest #2) What is that sound? People eating? (Zhu Ba Jie makes pig eating sounds) Pigs eating? I'll tell everyone someone is eating the offering food! (as he exits, he slips on a bit of food discarded by Alex and falls comically)

Alex

(as Zhu Ba Jie, seeing this, a big belly laugh) Ha ha ha! Ha ha ha ha!

Justin

(as Daoist Priest #2) Someone is laughing and eating in the temple! Buzz kill! (Justin exits)

Andria

(as Sun Wu Kong) Oh, now you've done it, brother! You couldn't keep your piggy mouth stuffed with food enough not to laugh at that man?

Alex
(as Zhu Ba Jie) He he he. I couldn't help it brother!

Ahmed
(as Sha Wu Jing) They'll bring us in front of the King for sure now!

Andria
(as Sun Wu Kong) No worries! I'll go by myself before they can find me. You two go back to the master and make sure he is safe. (Ahmed and Alex exit. Projection: The King's court. Sound: One of Elvis' hits. Justin enters as The King in full Elvis impersonator gear. Justin crosses to Andria. Andria drops character) What the...?

Justin
(as King) I'm the king, baby. It's good to be king! (winks at Andria) Listen up Monkey! I hear you been eatin' my Daoist's food offerings and scaring the priests away in the temple! That just can't be. Now I've got me one of them Immortals of Daoism in my city here. (Alex enters as Immortal: dark blue robe, white beard, with hippie gear and drum)

Alex
(as Immortal) Namaste, I have arrived. (bows)

Andria
(as Sun Wu Kong) Wait! What crimes have been committed? What evidence do you have? Mistakes are made every day!

Alex
(as Immortal) It surely was you. Only a Buddhist would disrespect our temple!

Justin
(as King) Now, hold on now. I got an idea. This Immortal can control the weather and make sure we have very good crops every year. If you can control the weather better than him, I'll let you off, Monkey!

Andria
(as Sun Wu Kong) Very well. (to Alex) You must say what you are praying for.

Alex
(as Immortal) I will pray once for wind, the second for clouds, the third for thunder, the fourth for rain. (Prays, hits drum and stomps around. Sound: wind. Prays again, hits drum. Projection: Clouds.)

Andria
(as Sun Wu Kong) Hmmm. He's winning. I'll have to disrupt him. (Andria twirls her staff like a fan. Sound: wind. Projection: clear blue sky)

Alex

(as Immortal) What? My magic has never failed. (looks at Andria) This must be some Buddhist trick!

Andria
(as Sun Wu Kong) I have done nothing.

Justin
(as King) How are we going to have a fair competition like this?

Andria
(as Sun Wu Kong) Great king, I could make rain all day. Controlling the weather is a small thing to me, as I have four dragon kings hovering in the sky above me now. Perhaps your majesty would care to see them?

Justin
(as King) Oh mama, in all my reign I've never seen a dragon!

Andria
(as Sun Wu Kong) We'll put that strait right now! Ho! Dragon Kings are you there? (Projection: Four dragon kings floating in the air)

Justin
(as King) Woah nelly! That's a real live dragon king. (to Monkey) You have clearly been wrongfully accused by this imposter Immortal. I hereby change my religion back to B-B-B-Buddhism!

Alex
(as Immortal, as he exits) Nooot cooollll mannnnnnn...

Andria
(as Sun Wu Kong) Spirits, you may now retire. (Projection: Court of the King. Andria and Justin freeze. Ahmed enters out of costume)

Ahmed
The group traveled onwards braving many difficulties, including a kingdom of only women, can you imagine? That was probably the most difficult part. But here is where we end the tales from *Journey to the West*. (Blackout, Lights up, actors begin to take costume pieces and props off. Alex enters)

Alex
What was that King character you were playing? We didn't decide on that.

Justin
I know! I found this backstage! Isn't it great! "Thank you, thank you very much."

Ahmed

I guess it's in line with our mission of making Chinese literature understandable to American audiences.

Andria

I don't think that's mentioned in the original manuscript.

Ahmed

I don't think that entire *Lord of the Rings* scene was mentioned in the original manuscript.

Alex

(looks at watch) Oh my god, did it take that long? We don't have any time to cover *Outlaws of the Marsh*!

Ahmed

Can't we just breeze through it like we did for Lao Zi and Sun Zi?

Justin

Yeah, we covered like 4,000 years! Only 2,000 to go! We're actually ahead of schedule!

Alex

No, no. We are completely off-schedule! We still have two of the four Classical novels, Confucius, Chinese drama, modern writers like Cao Yu and Lao She...(stage lights come down and house lights come up, cutting Alex off) Woah! Hey, Hey! NO, NO, NO! We don't have time for an intermission! Bring the lights back up! (lights come back up) Sorry, everyone, but to cover all that I outlined we're just going to have to cut the intermission. I apologize to your bladders in advance.

Ahmed

You'll have to apologize to the house manager if you hold these people much longer. And buy them new seats.

Alex

I'm sure that for the sake of knowledge these fine people can hold out another two hours. It's a small sacrifice they can make. (to audience) Look, if you just can't hold it then grab a balloon or two off the ground and relieve yourself.

Andria, Ahmed, Justin

NO!

Ahmed

Alex, we are united on this.

Justin

We need an intermission.

Andria

Regardless, I need a bathroom. I got iced two times!

Alex

OK, OK, but just because of Andria's bladder, (to audience) you are excused for intermission.

CURTAIN

ACT II

(Alex, Justin, and Ahmed enter the stage as the house lights flash. They interact with the audience for a few minutes, ad libs, talking to cute girls, etc.)

Alex
Ready to start?

Justin
Yeah!

Ahmed
Where's Andria? (Andria runs onstage)

Andria
Sorry I'm late. Those Ices were shooting through me!

Justin
Huddle up. (all huddle up)

Andria
So. You all know, Act II is harder. We can't break the illusion of reality. Ready...BREAK!
(actors break the huddle and face the audience)

Alex
(to audience) To set your minds at ease, we want you to know that we deeply considered and made choices when we were developing this play.

Ahmed
(to audience) Some were made backstage just now.

Andria
(to audience) How to have honest, believable action play upon the stage was one of the first questions we had to answer. (beat) And we're still not sure.

Alex
(to audience) Is everybody's mind at ease? Good.

Outlaws of the Marsh

Andria
(Picking up a book from the bookcase) The third of our four classical Chinese novels: *The Outlaws of the Marsh*. (Projection: *The Outlaws of the Marsh*) Also known as *All Men Are Brothers* in the Pearl S. Buck translation. She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932. This novel follows one hundred and eight raggedy ne'er-do-wells who eventually band together near Mount Liang in

Shandong province. It's full of people taking the law into their own hands, valuing freedom, personal choice, and resisting the government of "the man!"

Ahmed

Think *Red Dawn* meets *Robin Hood* complete with swashbuckling tales of derring-do. And, like *Robin Hood*, it was based on a real group of outlaws.

Justin

That sounds contrary to everything else we have learned about Chinese culture. I thought the Chinese valued things like stability, respect for authority, and peace.

Alex

Justin, if I may. The Chinese have a proverb, (Projection: "The young shouldn't read *The Outlaws of the Marsh* just as the old shouldn't read *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.") The young shouldn't read *The Outlaws of the Marsh* just as the old shouldn't read *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. This means that tales of outlaws may stir up revolutionary ideals in the young and so are more appropriate for the elderly to read and imagine what they could have done had they read this when they were younger. (pause)

Ahmed

We will focus on three of the stars: Wu Song, Lu Zhi Shen, and Lin Chong. Let's start with "Wu Song kills a tiger." (Ahmed puts on Wu Song costume and takes up a staff. Alex changes to Innkeeper. Justin sets a table and chair center stage. Projection: Inn)

Andria

Wu Song was a ferocious man who loved drinking and fighting more than Charlie Sheen. He was traveling in Yanggu county and decided to stop off for some wine at a local inn.

Ahmed

(as Wu Song, crosses to table and chairs) Innkeeper! I need wine!

Alex

(as Innkeeper, crosses to Ahmed) I'm so glad to see a customer. (places three bowls at the table in front of Ahmed and pours) You will find our local wine here to be very cheap and very potent.

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Great! I've been on the road all day. Bring me some meat too! (Alex gets a plate of meat, Ahmed drinks all three bowls) More wine!

Alex

(as Innkeeper) I'm very sorry but as you can read on our sign out front "Three bowls, forget the pass."

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) "Three bowls, forget the pass?" What does that saying mean?

Alex

(as Innkeeper) Our wine is very potent and those who drink three bowls of our wine get really drunk. So you see I cannot allow you to drink any more if you are planning to travel through Jing Yang pass. "Three bowls, forget the pass."

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Oh that's it. But I drank three bowls and I'm not drunk! What kinda cockamamie establishment is this?

Alex

(as Innkeeper) Some call our wine "Fragrant Glory" and others call it "The Bombshell." I call it "Night Train." It will lie in your stomach and go off like a time bomb, making you wasted immediately.

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Bah! That won't affect me. I ordered more wine! More wine! More meat!

Alex

(as Innkeeper) I can see there's no stopping you. I'll bring it out. (Alex pours three more bowls of wine and Ahmed drinks. This repeats several times.)

Andria

Wu Song was as stubborn as he was mighty. He sat drinking and eating for the better part of the afternoon.

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Well, that was good! Inkeep. Take this. (Ahmed tosses Alex a gold coin)

Alex

(as Innkeeper) Thank you. But you have drunk 18 bowls of wine.

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Keep the change! (Ahmed rises and starts out of the inn)

Alex

(as Innkeeper) Great sir! You must stop and stay here for the night! The government has issued a tiger warning for all of Yang Gu county!

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Tiger warning? Who ever heard of a tiger warning?

Alex

(as Innkeeper) There is a man-eating tiger loose on Jing Yang mountain! We have sent many hunting parties after it. Every night it eats somebody. You had better stay the night here. Come back inside and read the proclamation!

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Bah! You are just a greedy innkeep trying to rob me in my sleep! I'll never stay in your lousy inn! (Ahmed stomps off)

Andria

Wu Song stomped off towards Jing Yang pass. After a few miles he saw a tree near the road with a written warning against tigers. (Projection: Tiger Warning!)

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Bah! Probably something that snake of an innkeep put up to scare travelers to his inn!

Andria

Wu Song continued up the mountain until he reached a small temple. On the door had been posted the same official notice of a tiger being loose in the region.

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) What? The same notice? This must be the truth! But I can't go back now.

Andria

Wu Song proceeded onward but the wine was starting to hit him quite hard. All at once he felt tired and unstable on his feet.

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Wooah. That innkeep was right about "Night Train." I'll set myself down and rest a while.

Andria

Wu Song was just about to fall asleep when the ferocious, man-eating tiger appeared. (Justin enters as Tiger.)

Justin

(as Tiger) Rooooowwwrrr! This time *I'm* the tiger!

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) T-T-Tiger!

Andria

Wu Song scrambled out of the way to narrowly avoid the tiger's initial attack. (Justin lunges at Ahmed)

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Tiger! Get out of here now! Go on, get! Get you gone! (Justin does not move)

Andria

But the tiger didn't get. Wu Song raised his walking stick up to block the attack. (Justin lunges at Ahmed. Ahmed blocks with his walking stick in Justin's mouth.) But the tiger simply bit the stick in half. (Justin takes the stick out of his mouth, turns upstage and breaks it, then hands the broken stick to Ahmed)

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Curse that second hand stick store! I knew I should have gotten the extended warranty. Looks like I'll have to do this the old-fashioned way! Now this is happening! (Ahmed lunges at Justin)

Andria

Wu Song, using every ounce of drunken rage he could muster, walloped the tiger in the head.

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Take that! (Ahmed hits Justin in the head)

Justin

(as Tiger) What? You think that's all it will take to put me down? I've got tiger blood, bro!

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) Again! (Ahmed grapples with Justin and keeps punching him in the head until Justin dies. Ahmed collapses exhausted on top of Justin.)

Justin

(dropping character) Get off me, man! I can't breathe! (Justin exits, leaving the tiger skin behind)

Andria

And so the uncouth drunkard Wu Song killed the terrible man-eating tiger with his bare hands and fashioned a cape of tiger skin as a trophy. (Ahmed puts on the tiger skin like a cape)

Ahmed

(as Wu Song) This is a fine cape! Now, for more of that "Night Train." (Ahmed exits. Justin enters and crosses to Andria)

Justin

Wow! Great story. Was all of that true?

Andria

Yes! Well except for the "Night Train." They didn't have bum wine technology during the Song Dynasty. (pause) You know, I didn't think about this until just now, but that is our most faithful interpretation of literature yet. (Andria hands Justin the book and exits)

Justin

Lu Zhi Shen A.K.A. Sagacious Lu was a big, fat, cantankerous monk who was kicked out of a monastery on Mount Wutai for getting drunk, breaking the guardian idols, wrecking a pavilion and causing a riot in the hall of meditation! (to audience) Man, this guy sounds awesome!

(reading again) He stood tall at eight feet and sported a sweet beard. (Alex enters as Lu Zhi Shen, bald cap, beard, staff, and monk robes. Projection: Chinese house) After being expelled from his Wutai monastery with a letter that he needed to deliver in far off Kaifeng, he traveled to a small village. Arriving at nightfall, he knocked at the door of a house hoping to find shelter for the night. (Andria enters as Old Man. Justin exits)

Andria

(as Old Man) Oh, what a fearsome looking monk!

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) Hey! I was passing through on my way to Kaifeng in the east and hoped you could let me stay the night with you.

Andria

(as Old Man) I have let many monks stay with me as they traveled through the land. Please come in. What may I call you?

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) My family name is Lu, my abbot gave me my Buddhist name of "Sagacious." (dropping character, to audience) It means shrewd. You're taking notes, right?

Andria

(as Old Man) Do you hunger? We have food here, but as a holy man you don't eat meat.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) I'm not opposed to meat or wine. The wine can be clear or cloudy. The meat can be chicken or dog, I eat them all!

Andria

(as Old Man) Oh my! (Andria mimes serving food, eating and drinking throughout) Tonight is a special night and I am very anxious. Tonight my daughter is getting married.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) Ha, all men and women must get married sometime. Do you want me to perform the ceremony?

Andria

(as Old Man) No! I do not want this marriage to happen. Her husband-to-be is a notorious bandit leader who lives in the mountains above this village. He saw her just the other day and claimed her as his own. I am an old man and have no other children.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) So that's it! I will make him change his mind! When I was on Mount Wutai I learned the Buddhist laws of logic. I can talk any man around to my perspective. Tell your daughter to hide. I'll enter the bridal chamber and discuss this matter with the rogue when he comes. I will take more of that wine! (Ahmed enters. Alex drinks several cups)

Ahmed

Sagacious Lu drank several more cups of wine to prepare him for the confrontation. When the hour of the bandit's arrival was nigh, he went into the bridal chamber. Hiding his staff in the room, Lu Zhi Shen stripped naked, stepped into the bed and closed the curtains. (Alex acts this all out. Sound: Gongs) Suddenly the crash of gongs broke the night as the bandit chief arrived. (Justin enters on his white horse dressed as a bandit chief)

Justin

(drops character) Here, hold this. (gives his white horse to a confused Ahmed, as bandit chief to Andria) Ho there Father-in-law! So good of you to greet me!

Andria

(as Old Man, terrified) I....uuhhh....

Justin

(as bandit chief) No need to be modest, you aren't losing a daughter, you're gaining a son! (grabs the old man roughly around the shoulder and beats him on the back a few times)

Ahmed

The bandit chief was already half drunk so the quick thinking old man invited him in for a few more drinks before he collected his bride.

Andria

(as Old Man) Please tip a few cups with me first!

Justin

(as bandit chief) Why thank you! (they mime serving and drinking several cups) Where is my wife?

Andria

(as Old Man) Oh she is in her bedroom, she is too shy to come out.

Justin

(as bandit chief) Hahahaha, I'll put her right of that soon! Now I'm off to take what no man has taken before! (lurches to his feet and crosses to Alex)

Ahmed

The bandit felt his way to the bed in the pitch black room.

Justin

(as bandit chief, gropes in the dark) Wifey? Where are you? Come out to greet me.

Ahmed

He felt the bed curtains and reached his hand in.

Justin

(as bandit chief, reaches into bed) Wifey, come out and greet me.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen, grabbing Justin's hand, pulling him face first into the bed, punching him)
Shameless thief!

Justin

(as bandit chief, struggling) Oh! How can you do this to your husband?

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen, still punching Justin) I'm teaching you to recognize your mistress!

Justin

(as bandit chief) Help!

Ahmed

The other bandits and the old man heard the cry and entered the chamber. (Ahmed becomes a bandit with a sword and Andria enters the bedroom) They saw a big, fat monk without a stitch of clothes on beating their leader senseless on the bed.

Justin

(as bandit chief) Help!

Ahmed

(as bandit) We'll save you! (Ahmed runs forward with sword drawn)

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen, kicks Justin into charging Ahmed) I'll show you the color of your own blood!
(Ahmed and Justin fall over each other and exit)

Andria

(as Old Man) Oh no! This has all gone terribly wrong! You said you were going to talk with him.
(Justin enters)

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) Excuse my bad manners. If you will bring me my clothes then we can have a drink and discuss this.

Justin

Once Lu Zhi Shen was dressed he explained to the old man.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) I used to be a Major in the border guard of Yan'an Prefecture. I killed a man so I had to flee and become a monk on Mount Wutai. These piddling bandits are nothing to me.
Now about that drink... (Andria exits)

Justin

Sagacious Lu lived up to his name for a time, but eventually set out for his original destination of Kaifeng. (Ahmed enters as Chief Abbot in yellow monk robes, crosses to Alex. Projection: Big Chinese temple) Upon arrival at the Great Xiangguo monastery he was met by the chief abbot of the temple.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen, bows with one hand in front of him) A Mi Tuo Fu.

Ahmed

(dropping character) Uuuh, what? Tofu?

Alex

(dropping character) That's the traditional Buddhist greeting, "Buddha be praised."

Ahmed

I thought you were talking about tofu!

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) What is the proper reply, chief abbot?

Ahmed

(as Chief Abbot) Oh, of course. A Your Tofu (makes an awkward bow)

Alex

(dropping character) Worst monk ever! (as Lu Zhi Shen) I have a letter for you from Mount Wutai. (hands Ahmed a letter)

Ahmed

(as Chief Abbot, reads to himself) ...A most dangerous and violent monk...caused two riots...will bring disgrace upon your temple as surely as the sun rises in the east. (aside) I've got to find a way to get this guy out of here before anything bad happens. (thinks) I've got it. (back to Lu Zhi Shen) We maintain a vegetable garden to the south where all our food comes from. I will make you keeper of the garden and if you do this job well, in a year I will make you keeper of the pagoda.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) Humph! Well, if there's the opportunity for advancement, then I'm in. (Ahmed exits)

Justin

Sagacious Lu trotted off to tend his new charge. (Projection: Overgrown garden)

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) This vegetable field is a mess! There must be thieves stealing from it in the night. I'll post a sign to show them there's a new sheriff in town. (Alex mimes writing and posting a sign in the ground)

Justin

And he did just that. Soon the nearby riff-raff came to see the sign. (Ahmed and Justin enter as rascals: dirty robes)

Ahmed

(as rascal 1) Hey, what's this? A new monk in charge of the garden?

Justin

(as rascal 2) Haha. I'll bet he's just as big a pushover as the last one was.

Ahmed

(as rascal 1) We should play a trick on him to let him know who's boss here. That way we can keep stealing the vegetables.

Justin

(as rascal 2) Great idea! We'll lure him over by the cesspool with wine and pastries, but then grab his legs and push him in at the last moment! (Andria enters. Justin and Ahmed chatter excitedly to themselves and prepare the wine and pastries)

Andria

The next day, Lu Zhi Shen was patrolling the garden with his big staff when he saw two odd looking fellows waving him over near the cesspool.

Ahmed

(as rascal 1) Hello! Yoo-hoo! We are your neighbors! (waving Alex over)

Justin

(as rascal 2) We heard you were taking over the temple garden and wanted to treat you with some wine and pastries! (waving Alex over)

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen, to himself) Hmm. These fellows don't look like the type to welcome a new monk. More like the type to steal vegetables! And who serves pastries near a cesspool? I'll approach with caution, just to check if the wine is real. (Alex crosses to Ahmed and Justin)

Justin

(as rascal 2, falling to his knees) Oh, glorious monk.

Ahmed

(as rascal 1, falling to his knees) We humbly welcome you to the neighborhood. (Ahmed goes for Alex's right leg, but Alex kicks him into the cesspool. Justin goes for Alex's left leg, but Alex also kicks him into the cesspool. Justin and Ahmed adlib)

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen, pointing his staff at them) Ha! I knew you two were up to no good! Have you been stealing the produce from here? Speak!

Justin

(as rascal 2) Yes! Please have mercy on us and let us out.

Ahmed

(as rascal 1) We promise never to do it again!

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) Very well then, come up out of it. (Ahmed and Justin stand)

Andria

The ruffians and Lu Zhi Shen quickly became good friends. (Ahmed, Alex and Justin mime eating and drinking) One night after drinking heavily and eating meat the group spotted a crow's nest high in a willow tree.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) Hey! There is a crow's nest up in this tree.

Ahmed

(as rascal 1) Ooh. Crows are an ill omen! They eat carrion!

Justin

(as rascal 2) Get a ladder and I'll knock it down.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) No need for that.

Andria

And with that Lu Zhi Shen pulled his robe aside, braced his legs, and pulled the entire willow tree out of the ground. (Alex acts the above out and freezes in a tableau. Projection: the famous painting of Lu Zhi Shen uprooting the willow tree is projected in the background.)

Ahmed

(as rascal 1, in awe) The master is no ordinary mortal!

Justin

(as rascal 2, in awe) Surely he is one of the Lohans!

Ahmed

(dropping character, laughing) Ha ha ha what? Like Lindsey Lohan?

Justin

(dropping character) No... I mean... Oh I didn't even realize that. Yeah, because he (gestures to Alex) drinks a lot and does crazy things. No I meant in Buddhism a Lou Han is one who has reached the "other shore" and is saved for all eternity. They have great wisdom and supernatural powers...

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) Hey! I'm still holding my pose here!

Justin and Ahmed

Sorry! (they resume character, Ahmed exits)

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen, continues to uproot the tree and toss it aside) Ha! That was nothing. One of these days I'll show you how to handle weapons!

Andria

"One of these days" came the very next day when, after a feast of pig and goat, with a liberal dose of wine, Sagacious Lu hauled out his iron Buddhist staff.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen, holding his staff high) Now, see here! This staff weights sixty-six pounds! Not one of you can hold it. But watch me. (Alex performs some kung fu maneuvers with the staff)

Andria

Just as Lu Zhi Shen was getting warmed up, a man happened to stop and watch. (Ahmed enters as Lin Chong- helmet, robe, sword) He was tall and about 35 years old. He wore the robe of a military officer.

Ahmed

(as Lin Chong) Remarkable! Indeed remarkable.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen, stops, to Justin) Who is that officer?

Justin

(as rascal 2) That's Lin Chong, head arms instructor for the imperial garrison.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) I must meet him.

Andria

The man approached and bowed to Lu Zhi Shen.

Ahmed

(as Lin Chong, bows) You already know who I am, but where are you from, fearsome monk?

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) I'm from back west. I used to serve in the border guards. I know your honorable father, Major Lin.

Ahmed

(as Lin Chong) I can't believe it. It must be that fate has twisted us together like this! We will become sworn brothers this night!

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) I'll drink to that! (they both drink)

Andria

And they became sworn brothers, just like that. (Justin and Alex exit) After a convoluted incident involving the evil Chief Marshal Gao Qiu, Lin Chong was exiled to a far-off city (Projection: map of route from Kaifeng to Cangzhou, Ahmed starts walking) But along the way his guards had orders to murder him. (Justin enters as Guard 1 grabs Ahmed's sword, Andria becomes Guard 2. Projection: path near a forest)

Justin

(as Guard 1, to Guard 2) Tonight, we'll take him into the Wild Boar Forrest and have done with him.

Andria

(as Guard 2, to Guard 1) Yeah, we're already a good 40 miles from Kaifeng. (to Lin Chong) We break for the night here.

Ahmed

(as Lin Chong) Oh, my weary bones! (collapses on the floor)

Justin

(as Guard 1) You have slowed us down in our travels. We have orders to make sure that doesn't happen anymore.

Andria

(as Guard 2) Marshal Gao Qiu sends his regards!

Justin

(as Guard 1) Ha, ha, ha! (raises up his sword to kill Alex) A year from this day will be the anniversary of your death! (as he strikes, Alex jumps into the scene to block the blow with his staff)

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) HUUUUUAH! (Justin and Andria ad lib surprise) HUUUUUAH!

Ahmed

(as Lin Chong) Brother! Stay your hand. These men were under orders to kill me.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) I know, I was listening for a while. (walks to Justin and Andria threateningly)
Now what should I do with you?

Andria

(as Guard 2) Nothing! We were bribed by Marshal Gao!

Justin

(as Guard 1) He paid us in gold!

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) You scurvy rats! If it weren't for my brother here, I would pound both of you into mouse meat!

Ahmed

(dropping character) Mincemeat, Alex.

Alex

(as Lu Zhi Shen) Whatever kind of animal meat! (points staff at them) Now both of you are going to carry Lin Chong to the nearest tavern. I have a bit of a thirst!

Justin and Andria

(as Guards, disappointed) Ohhhh... (the two guards lift Ahmed up and carry him around the stage.)

Ahmed

(as Lin Chong) Right on, brother! Meat and wine for everybody!

Justin

(dropping character but holding Ahmed) And there were many, many other stories about derring-do, banditry, and violence towards women-sorry ladies. But we will end here the tales from *The Outlaws of the Marsh*! (drops Ahmed)

Ahmed

Heeey! (Blackout, Lights up, Cast gets out of props and costumes)

Justin

I can't believe that those stories were based on fact! I would have loved to see the dashing Lin Chong or drunk a bowl or two with Lu Zhi Shen and Wu Song. What happened to those three characters at the end of the book?

Andria

Lu Zhi Shen starved himself to death in a monastery. Lin Chong took sick and died. Wu Song decapitated his brother's wife, got his arm chopped off, and retired to a temple to peacefully die at eighty.

Justin
Oh. Thanks.

Alex
The Outlaws of the Marsh are a prime example of honor among thieves. How when kings ignore their own laws and regulations, rebellion can happen.

Justin
But who sets the rules for the rulers?

Alex
I'm glad you asked. One man laid down the foundations of Chinese statecraft many years ago. His books were an ancient "idiot's guide to behavior." He said that the country should be like a big family, with the king as the father. His name was...

The Analects

Ahmed
Confucius! Everyone's heard of him, but what do you know of him?

Alex
(projection: Filial Piety) Confucius introduced the concept of filial piety to China. That the parents should take care of their children when they are young and then be taken care of by their children when they are old. (Andria exits)

Justin
That seems like a simple concept.

Alex
You would think so, but in ancient China they saw old people as a liability and worthless drain on family resources. (Alex exits)

Justin
That's where we get the Chinese saying "Be nice to you kids, they will choose your nursing home." (beat, Justin exits)

Ahmed
Confucius changed all that. Born over 2,500 years ago, he was a just and able advisor for the Duke of Lu, always telling him the right thing to do. But evil court officials corrupted the Duke into ignoring Confucius' advice, and he was fired. Confucius began wandering China looking to advise the great and small on matters of state, ethics, and etiquette. Probably like what you grandparents did after they retired. He wrote several books outlining his philosophy but we have chosen to condense just one and present it to you. (Projection: *The Analects*) His book of "fortune cookie wisdom" titled *The Analects*. (Ahmed exits)

Justin

(enters holding a microphone, mic stand and a small drum and cymbal.) And I'm told he is a really funny guy. Here he is, fresh from the road -and boy is his donkey tired- Confucius! (Sound: applause, Lights: cabaret lighting, Projection: Brick wall. Justin sits in a chair near Andria to provide the rimshots).

Andria

(enters as Confucius with raggedy robes, suit jacket and tie. Confucius is a lot like Jerry Seinfeld) Hello everybody! How ya doin? I'm so glad to be here. I recently resigned my position in Lu so I figured I'd give stand-up comedy a try. Hey! If Carrot Top can make it, how hard can it be? (rimshot) So what's the deal with the Duke of Lu? I tell him "let the sovereign do his duty as a sovereign, the subject his duty as a subject, the father his duty as a father, and the son his duty as a son." So what does he do? He goes and promotes his nephew. I mean COME ON. The man's only qualification is that he has two legs. (rimshot) I'm all for filial piety, but this is ridiculous! (rimshot) But seriously though, I've become concerned about corruption among the royalty of Lu. So I go to the Prime Minister and I says to him "Hey, Prime Minister, the Duke just appointed his nephew Minister of Commerce and he's fleecing everybody for extra cash." The Prime Minister says to me, "This nepotism is a serious issue for the land. I'll create a special independent commission to investigate it. My brother is just the man for the job!" (rimshot) Can you believe it folks? Right here in China. And baseball? What is the deal with baseball? I mean "a man who has four balls cannot walk."

Justin

(whispering) Andria, I don't think Confucius ever said...

Andria

(dropping character, whispering) Shush, I'm just getting them warmed up. (as Confucius) Don't you know "The princely type of man is modest in his speech, but liberal in his performance." And I'm nothing if not liberal in my performance, just ask my wife. (rimshot) I know! My son and his girlfriend really had to find a new house in a hurry though, because my son had gotten her pregnant. And you know what I always say when that happens? "A shotgun wedding is a case of wife or death." (rimshot) Enough about family, lets get into politics, my main money-maker. They say don't speak truth to power, I say when serving a prince "use no deceit, but if you oppose him, oppose him openly." Of course I'm now a wandering vagabond without a job, home or any possessions. (rimshot) You know, when I was young my mother begged me not to study history. When I asked her why, she said "Don't study history, there is no future in it." (rimshot) I had to find that one out the hard way. The study of history had gotten me down, I mean really down. But then I was retained by the Duke of Lu to serve in his court as an advisor. It just goes to show that "The nobler sort of man tends upwards, the baser sort tends downwards." And the vagabond sort tends to live in an alley. (rimshot) But in essence every duke or marquis I have ever worked for is just another politician. Let me give you some advice: "A politician is one who shakes your hand before an election and your confidence after it." (rimshot) Not that we have ever had elections here in China. It's just what I hear. Might be wrong. The Duke would always be asking me for advice on the simplest things. Once he asked me what was better than the man who knows what is right. I says to him "Better than one who knows what is right is one who is fond of what is right; and better than one who is fond of what

is right is one who delights in what is right.” And better than one who delights in what is right is one who does the right thing and buys me a drink! (rimshot) We all know that many times doing the wrong thing can get you a rich reward. But “What then is to be the return for good? Rather you should return justice for injustice and good for good.” (pause) I’d have a joke there but I just confused myself! (rimshot) I been yapping too long up here anyway. I ought to remember “to save face, keep the lower part of it closed!” (rimshot) Thank you! Thank you! You’ve been a great audience! Remember to tip me. I’m a homeless teacher, literally! (Rimshot, Andria drops character)

Justin

Wow, I didn’t think that 2,500 year old observational humor would go over as well as it did.

Ahmed

Justin, some things are timeless. So *The Outlaws of the Marsh* would have read Confucius?

Andria

Certainly the villain Gao Qiu and the other corrupt officials would have. They should have taken Confucius’s advice to rule with an even hand, using no deceit. (Thinks) Lu Zhi Shen and Wu Song had limited formal education, but Lin Chong would have read Confucius.

Ahmed

I thought China had system of promotions based on education and testing whereby the smartest people were promoted to the highest office. (pause, all look at Ahmed) What?

Alex

You’re right. The imperial examination system was inspired by Confucianism and lasted for over 1,200 years in China. If you wanted any kind of government job, you had to study all of Confucius’s books for years. Hey! That’s a good segue into Chinese drama! The theatre educates! Chinese drama is quite different from theatre here in the West. (passing out 3x5 notecards for actors to read from.) Chinese theatre basically started in the Yuan dynasty. Some scholars theorize it was because the Mongolian-ruling class forced Chinese scholar-ministers out of their government jobs. These educated individuals turned to playwriting to make a living.

Justin

That’s the first and only time people quit government jobs to write for the theatre.

Alex

We narrowed down our play selections to four. What are our choices, Ahmed?

Ahmed

(reads from card) *The Romance of the Western Chamber* is a bawdy romantic comedy rife with sexual tension and innuendo. It’s the *American Pie* of the Yuan Dynasty.

Alex

(reads from card) *The Peony Pavilion*, in contrast, is a chaste romance in the classical “scholar-beauty” genre. It is most famously performed in the Kun Qu style of Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces.

Andria

That would be a treat! (reads from card) *The Butterfly Lovers* is a romantic folktale set in the Eastern Jin dynasty. It has been adapted into opera, TV, movies... almost omnipresent in China. A Chinese *Romeo and Juliet* complete with tragic deaths at a tomb!

Justin

You just gave away the ending, they don’t want to see it now! (reads from card) *The Legend of Whitesnake* details the rise and fall of the quintessential 80’s hair-metal band Whitesnake. Themes of sex, drugs, and rock and roll are discussed. The debate between mousse and hair spray reaches a fever pitch and...

Alex

(angry) Give me that! (snatches card from Justin, reads) Oh, ha ha ha you guys! Let’s take the Beijing opera *The Legend of White Snake* and make it into a poor *Spinal Tap* spoof!

Ahmed

I don’t think you can spoof a spoof.

Alex

Shut up! You guys ruined the one thing I really wanted to do well tonight.

Justin

(Justin crosses to Alex) Ok, ok we’re sorry. But in my defense, it was Andria’s idea.

Andria

Justin!

Justin

Think about it a minute. There are many parallels between Beijing Opera and 80s hair metal.

Alex

Yeah? Like what?

Ahmed

High pitched wailing and shrieking.

Alex

Ok.

Justin

Crazy costumes.

Ahmed
Heightened drama played on a stage.

Alex
Hmm...(thinks)

Ahmed
Overuse of makeup.

Andria
A focus on spectacle.

Justin
Men dressing like women.

Ahmed
Set roles with little change or variation in their performance.

Alex
Ok, you make some good points but I don't see how this will help us present this play.

The Legend of the White Snake

Andria
You just leave that to me. *The Legend of the White Snake* is based on an ancient folk tale. Most of the action takes place in the coastal city of Hangzhou (Projection: map of Hangzhou's location in China) and in a few other locations in east China. We have Lady White Snake and her maid Blue Snake, Xu Xian...

Justin
Great! I'll be Lady White Snake and you (to Ahmed) can be my maid Blue Snake!

Ahmed
Thrilled...(Justin drags Ahmed offstage)

Andria
I will play the handsome young scholar Xu Xian. (exits)

Alex
I'll just be the Monk Fa Hai! (Alex exits. Some sweet hair metal music begins to play. Projection: The Legend of Whitesnake. The music changes to "In the Still of the Night" by Whitesnake. Throughout this song the actors sing like Def Leppard rejects. Singing will coincide with the lyrics of the original song. Speaking will be done out of rhythm.)

(Justin/ White snake and Ahmed/ Blue snake walk onstage. Ahmed wears a blue dress. Justin wears a white dress.)

Justin

(as White Snake, sings) The West Lake here is a great place, honey

Far from our home in E Mei.

We're walking along, I feel my heart beating heavy

Young man walking my way. (Andria/ Xu Xian enters and crosses to Justin and Ahmed)

Under the rain we share a boat now, honey (Justin, Ahmed, and Andria enter a boat together)

Taking me back to my house

Lend me your umbrella, cute young fella

Tomorrow I have a spouse.

Spa-Spa-Spa -Spouse!

Andria

(speaks) What? A spouse? Don't you think we're moving too fast?

Justin

(sings) Well I just wanna get close to you (Justin nudges Andria)

Taste your herbs so sweet

And I just wanna make love to you

Feel your body heat... (Justin embraces Andria)

Andria

(Breaks character, speaks) Get off me!

Justin

(Breaks character, speaks) What? I'm a cold-blooded animal!

Justin

(as White Snake, Sings again) Lets move to Zhenjiang.

It won't be long.

Overlooking the Yangtze, babe.

You set up your shop (Andria mimes being a doctor)

Selling herbs and meds

Curein' people when they ache

One day Fa Hai, a monk, strolled in (Alex/ Fa Hai enters dressed as a monk and crosses to Andria)

Say-

Alex

(as Fa Hai, sings) Your wife is an ancient sn-snake!

Andria

(as Xu Xian, sings) Ooooh! That's not true!

Alex

(as Fa Hai, sings) If you don't believe,
Give her realgar wine,
You see your wife is changing,
And it isn't fineeeeeeee... (Ahmed exits)

Andria

(as Xu Xian, sings) Oooh baby, Oooh baby.
I needed the realgar wine. (Andria gets the wine and brings it to Justin/White Snake on the bed.
Justin/White Snake initially refuses to drink the wine)
Can't keep away, can't get away.
Can't keep away, Nooooo.
(speaks) I have to make my wife drink this wine!
Ya gotta drink the wine.
Ya gotta drink this wine on this special day.
Can't keep away.
(Alex/Fa Hai and Ahmed/Blue Snake enter with huge 80's hair metal/ Beijing opera wigs. They
play air guitar during the guitar solo. Justin/White Snake drinks the wine and is taken ill,
violently assuming her natural form of a giant white snake.)

Andria

(as Xu Xian, sings) Oooh baby, ooh woman. Waaaaaaahhhh!
(Andria/Xu Xian sees this and dies of shock. Justin/White Snake resumes human form,
lamenting the loss of her husband. Ahmed/Blue Snake comes back to the room once the sweet
guitar solo ends. Alex Exits)

Ahmed

(As Blue Snake, speaks) Your husband has died.

Justin

(as White Snake sings) I feel the sorrow honey.
I'll fly off and find the cure.
On my cloud to the Kun Lun mountains
My husband's life to restore....
Oooh Fly Off.... (Justin/White Snake flies off stage)
I just wanna find you the cure
Feel your love so sweet (Justin/White Snake finds a magical plant and returns to Andria)
And I just wanna save your life
So we once more can meet.
(Justin/White Snake gives Andria/Xu Xian the plant. He revives and runs from Justin/White
Snake. Alex/Fa Hai appears.)

Alex

(as Fa Hai, sings) Your wife has tricked you! Oooh yeah!

Andria

(as Xu Xian sings) How can I be saved?

Alex

(as Fa Hai, speaks) Join my temple as a monk.

(sings) She'll come round here no more, oooh. (Andria/Xu Xian joins and crosses to the other side of Alex. Justin and Ahmed appear at the temple and are stopped by Alex) (sings) Demon be gone!

(speaks) It's my duty to protect mortals from the likes of you! You'll never get him now.

Justin

(as White Snake, sings) Give me my man.

Justin and Ahmed

(As White Snake and Blue Snake, sing) And nothing's gonna stop us now! (Ahmed, Alex, and Justin all do a "rock and roll" battle)

Justin, Alex, and Ahmed

(as White Snake, Blue Snake, Fa Hai sing) So we will fight!

So we will fight!

So we will fight!

(The battle rages on until Alex leaves and Andria comes out of the temple. Ahmed tries to kill Andria but Justin protects him)

Ahmed

(as Blue Snake, sings) Let me kill him

Let me kill him

Justin

(as White Snake, sings) No don't you dare.

Andria

(as Xu Xian, talks) Please! Fa Hai kept me captive. At first I was afraid of you, my wife. But seeing you here...

Justin

(as White Snake, speaks) Yes...

Andria

(as Xu Xian, sings) Now I love you,

Love the real you,

I'll be with you...

Justin

(as White Snake, speaks) Oh, we'll be so happy together! (Andria, Justin and Ahmed embrace.

Music ends)

(Blackout, Lights up. Actors take off props and costumes)

Andria

Wow, that had pathos. (Alex enters)

Ahmed

I liked that.

Justin

You know, Ahmed, I'm picking up on a trend in Chinese literature.

Ahmed

What's that?

Justin

Drinkin' and fighting. Almost every piece we have condensed so far involved those two elements. Many at the same time.

Andria

Unfortunately, *all* the Chinese literature we will touch upon in this show was written by men.

Alex

Women were usually not educated in traditional Chinese civilization. Though that has been corrected in modern times, China is still a very patriarchal society. (projection: "Zhong Nan Qing Nu") "Zhong Nan Qing Nu" is a Chinese phrase that literally means "heavy men, light women," And I'm not talking about football players and cheerleaders here.

Justin

It's a defense of putting men before women.

Alex

(uncomfortable) Yes... ahem.

Dream of Red Mansions

Justin

(holding up a small book) Well lucky for us, the condensation of the next book is almost entirely devoted to women and tragic romance.

Andria

Originally titled *The Story of the Stone* by Cao Xue Qin, the fourth of the Four Classical Chinese Novels is more commonly called *Dream of Red Mansions*.

Alex

The author was born into a very rich upper-class family that squandered its fortunes in the course of a few years. Written as an allegory and commentary on the aristocracy, it deals with two

wealthy families: the Zhens and the Jias. Zhen being a homophone for “real” in Chinese language and “Jia” being a homophone for “fake.”

Ahmed

We’ll spare you the details on all 400 characters and focus on the male protagonist, Jia Bao Yu. He’s the kind of sensitive, cunning, playboy that drove all the middle Qing Dynasty ladies wild! Romance! Ah Yeah! (Justin, Ahmed, and Andria exit)

Alex

We were deciding how to present this piece. How should we showcase the only work that has significant female characters? What means of conveyance would be most digestible to our American audience? Then the thought struck me: What’s more empowering to women than soap operas? (Alex exits, Sound: soap opera music, Projection: Hourglass.)

Deep Voice

(sound cue) Like sands through the hourglass, so do we Dream of Red Mansions. (Justin crosses center and poses as Jia Bao Yu: red robe and necklace with jade on it. Andria, Alex, and Ahmed all enter and take up dramatic poses. Alex wears a white robe with female wig and jewelry. Andria wears a green robe with female wig and jewelry. Ahmed wears a yellow robe with female wig and jewelry. Everyone acts in an over-the-top “bad soap opera” style. Projection: Last Time, on Dream of Red Mansions...) Last time on “Dream of Red Mansions...”

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) Whatever shall I do for riddling day? I can’t disappoint Grandma Jia with a poor riddle.

Andria

(as Lin Dai Yu, crosses to Justin) Oh, BaoYu, you have to help me make a riddle. It would be eversomuch better if you helped me.

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) Perhaps I can. What item would you like to make your riddle about?

Andria

(as Lin Dai Yu) Don’t ask me! I’m sure I don’t know. Ever since you made fun of me by comparing me to a silly child actor just to get a laugh from the other girls, I’ve been cross with you!

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) I never made this comparison and I never laughed at you! Why are you angry with me?

Andria

(as Lin Dai Yu) Well you would have *liked* to have made that comparison! To me your way of *not* comparing and *not* laughing was worse than the others’ laughing and comparing! (Andria exits crying)

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) Wait! Dai Yu!

Alex

(as Hua Xi Ren, crosses to Justin , seductively) There you are Bao Yu! The Three Spring Sisters were searching all over for you, but I told them you were watching the kittens play outside. We're all alone here now...

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) Hua Xi Ren...(Alex and Justin almost kiss) I...We can't. You're my maid. What would my mother say?

Alex

(as Hua Xi Ren, seductively) Forget about her...I've got a riddle for you. What did the girl snake say to the boy snake?

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) I don't know.

Alex

(as Hua Xi Ren, seductively) Give me a hisss.

Justin

(breaks character) Oh. That was pretty bad. (as Jia Bao Yu) No! This "thing" we had is over!

Alex

(as Hua Xi Ren) Oh, You're impossible! (exits crying)

Ahmed

(as Xue Bao Chai, crosses to Justin) Hello cousin Jia Bao Yu.

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) Cousin Xue Bao Chai. Have you recovered from you illness?

Ahmed

(as Xue Bao Chai) Yes, thank you. I have always heard about this famous stone you were born with. I would like to take a look at it.

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) No! Since I was born with this magical piece of jade in my mouth (referring to the jade pendent on his necklace) many people think I'm destined for great things. But I just want to find someone else who was born with jade in their mouth. I just want to find her...my soul mate. (freeze)

Deep Voice

(sound cue) And now for the thrilling conclusion. (Justin and Ahmed exit. Sound: Soap opera music continues. Projection: Dream of Red Mansions)

Andria

(enters as Lin Dai Yu, tosses flower petals on stage during her line.) Look at all the gently falling flower petals. They blossom and enrich the world but are ultimately doomed to die. Thus is the transient nature of life. (begins to cry)

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu, enters) The spring is such a good time for flower watching. Now that Grandmother Jia has let the girls and myself live in the garden, (scoops up a flower on the ground) I can devote all my time to watching the buds open into beautiful, fragrant blossoms. Oh. Lin Dai Yu! I didn't see you.

Andria

(as Lin Dai Yu) Oh, Bao Yu! (tries to hide her crying)

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) You have been crying. Why ever for? I apologized for the imagined slight that I didn't commit yesterday.

Andria

(as Lin Dai Yu) I know but it's just that these flowers are... so...beautiful...(cries again)

Ahmed

(enters as Xue Bao Chai) Oh Bao Yu, there you are. I wanted to ask your advice on making poems for the imperial concubine's visit next week. (nods) Dai Yu.

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) I do have a little skill with poetry. Let me see. I think it should start with a beautiful metaphor.

Ahmed

(as Xue Bao Chai) Oh, I like that. It should be sensual but not too arousing... (they lean toward each other) If I can take a look at your jade pendent...

Alex

(entering as Hua Xi Ren with a bulge in her robe) Bao Yu! And Xue Bao Chai! And Lin Dai Yu! What are you two doing here?

Ahmed

(as Xue Bao Chai) Huh! I could ask you the same thing!

Alex

(as Hua Xi Ren) Me? I came out here to talk with Bao Yu in private. I am his principal maid, after all.

Andria

(as Lin Dai Yu goes to Ahmed) Well, we're his cousins. Anything you can say to him you can say to us!

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) Ladies, please. Hua Xi Ren, what is it you wanted to tell me?

Alex

(as Hua Xi Ren) They might as well hear it. I'm in love with you, Bao Yu! (Sound: Soap opera organ vamp)

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) Hua Xi Ren...I don't know what to say... I'm in love with Lin Dai Yu! (Sound: Soap opera organ vamp)

Alex

(as Hua Xi Ren) Her? Impossible! You can't because...I'm pregnant! (Alex reveals a large round mound under the robe. Sound: Soap opera organ vamp)

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu) No! Impossible.

Alex

(as Hua Xi Ren) Yes! It's true!

Ahmed

(as Xue Bao Chai) I don't believe it! I see through your scheme, you sniveling maid! (walks to Alex and pulls a pillow out of the robe.) It was a ruse all along. (All gasp. Sound: Soap opera ending music)

Deep Voice

(sound cue) Tune in next time when you'll hear Jia Bao Yu say...

Justin

(as Jia Bao Yu, to Xue Bao Chai) *You* haven't got one. (to Lin Dai Yu) *You* haven't got one. (to Hua Xi Ren) And *you* haven't got one. Only *I* have got one! (holds his jade necklace) I'm forsaking this crazy, lust-soaked, suffering-stricken life and retiring to a monastery! (soap opera music crescendo and applause, blackout. Andria and Justin exit. Ahmed and Alex take off props and costumes)

Ahmed

Wow. The Jia family had all that wealth and they spent their time writing poems about flowers and creating love triangles. Such a waste. Why didn't they help the people? The Qing dynasty was powerful!

Alex

That's true, but the Qing dynasty was China's last dynasty. By this time, the West had made contact with China and begun carving out little pieces of the country to call their own. People had enough of the bloated Imperial system with just a few getting all the benefits. They wanted equality and new rights! Eventually due to corruption, greed, weakness and the influence of foreign ideas, the emperor was toppled during the Xin Hai revolution in 1911.

Ahmed

And then after 35 years of near-constant warfare Chairman Mao and the Communists ended up on top in the Chinese civil war, establishing the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Mao's Little Red Book

Alex

Perfect segue, Ahmed! Our final book is *The Collected Quotations of Chairman Mao Zedong*, known in the West as Mao's "Little Red Book." It sounds like *Little Red Riding Hood*. But more militant. (Alex exits.)

Ahmed

Scholars estimate Mao's "Little Red Book" has been printed over *one billion times*. It is considered the second most popular book of all time, right behind *The Bible*. Mao worked as a librarian at Peking University when he read Marx and Engels. But since Friedrich Engels died a few years back and we couldn't get him here on such short notice, I am proud to present to you, direct from Trier, Germany... Put your hands together for Kaaaaaarl Marx! (Justin enters dressed as Groucho Marx- glasses, moustache, cigar. Andria enters dressed as Harpo- top hat, red wig, horn. Ahmed grabs a mic and puts on tie and suit jacket to become the Announcer. Sound: You Bet Your Life Theme, Projection: You Bet Your Life!)

Justin

(as Groucho) Hiya, hiya, hiya! How's everybody doing? So sorry my dear old bother Karl couldn't make it here today but I came in his place, and brought my other brother Harpo. Say hello Harpo! (Harpo honks his horn) He's like a goose: not much for talking but he sure can honk! (Harpo honks his horn.)

Ahmed

(as Announcer) If I'm not mistaken Karl Marx passed away over a hundred years ago.

Justin

(as Groucho) He's just using that as an excuse! (Harpo honks his horn.) We're all very close in the Marx family: Chico, Zeppo, Karl, Harpo, and me, Groucho! I've come all the way out here to meet the man who wrote the little red book: Mao Zedong. (aside) I'll ask him for some writing tips. If I had a nickel for every copy of that book... (Harpo honks his horn)

Alex

(Alex enters as Mao Zedong and crosses to Justin) Ah, the great Groucho Marx! Thank you for a chance to be on your game show! (shakes Justin's hand roughly)

Justin

(as Groucho) I tell you I'm tickled to meet the man who helped China to stand up. I've been stood up on dates many times. (Harpo honks his horn)

Ahmed

(as Announcer) Mr. Mao don't forget to say the secret word! It's a common word, something you see everyday. Say it out loud and win \$50!

Alex

(as Mao) Thank you. (to Justin) I have read all your brother Karl's books.

Justin

(as Groucho) Read his books, have you? I hope you bought them first. We need the *Das Kapital*! (Harpo honks his horn) Did you read his books all the way through?

Alex

(as Mao) Well actually I had it read out loud to me. My eyes tire easily.

Justin

(as Groucho) So did you like it?

Alex

(as Mao) Yes, it was very influential in my early years!

Justin

(as Groucho) Thank god it wasn't influenza in your girly ears! (Harpo honks his horn) So, Mao, is that a gun in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?

Alex

(as Mao) Political power flows from the barrel of a gun.

Justin

(as Groucho) I can't agree with you more, chairman. If I were a politician I'd like to carry a loaded gun with me too! (Harpo honks his horn) I hope you won't be insulted, but I always thought you chairmen were an indecisive bunch.

Alex

(as Mao) How can you say that? I instituted a dictatorship of the proletariat! The bourgeois have been deposed in China! China has stood up!

Justin

(as Groucho) Chairman, I say that because you haven't decided if you're going to be a person or a piece of furniture. (Harpo honks his horn) You know, Mao, I read somewhere you changed the titles of some of my movies for their Chinese release.

Alex

(as Mao) That's true. I think we ended up improving the films.

Justin

(as Groucho) You improved the films, uh? How did you improve *Duck Soup*?

Alex

(as Mao) We titled it *Peking Duck Soup*.

Justin

(as Groucho) How about *A Night at the Opera*?

Alex

(as Mao) *A Night at the Peking Opera*.

Justin

(as Groucho) *Room Service*? No, no, no. Let me guess: *Peking Room Service*. (aside) Sounds like a dirty movie if you ask me! (Harpo honks his horn)

Alex

(as Mao) Ho, ho, ho. You Americans and your movies! We didn't release that one.

Justin

(as Groucho) Why not?

Alex

(as Mao) The only thing a good Communist should serve is the people! (Harpo honks his horn)

Justin

(as Groucho) Hey! I'm supposed to be the one telling the jokes here! Serve the people, not rooms? I see what you did there. I understand you recently authored a book of your collected sayings and it's been selling quite well. Can you let the people here have a taste of some of your ideas from the book?

Alex

(as Mao) A splendid idea! "Where do correct ideas come from? Do they drop from the skies? No. Are they innate from the minds? No. They come from social practice, and from it alone; they come from three kinds of social practice: the struggle for production, the class struggle, and scientific experiment."

Justin

(as Groucho) Good stuff, Chairman. But it's not all roses and rainbows in this new book, I understand. Several prominent men of letters have been criticizing your book as too militant and wordy.

Alex

(as Mao) Like all great leaders, I anticipated this and have a quote from my book addressing just this. “As for criticism, do it in good time; don’t get into the habit of criticizing only after the event.”

Justin

(as Groucho) Wow, now that’s what I call proactive. How do you handle people criticizing your political ideology? Besides the gun, of course. (Harpo honks his horn)

Alex

(as Mao) “In the Party, we have the Marxist-Leninist weapon of criticism and self-criticism. We can get rid of a bad style and keep the good.”

Justin

(as Groucho) Could you say one criticism in the hand is worth two in the book? (Harpo honks his horn) That one was a stretch. So speaking of political ideology, how does the party you are chairman of respond to this criticism?

Alex

(as Mao) “The Communist Party does not fear criticism because we are Marxists, the truth is on our side, and the basic masses, the workers and peasants are on our side.”

Justin

(as Groucho) Tell me a little more about your Communist Party. (aside) I always like to learn about a new party! (Harpo honks his horn)

Alex

(as Mao) Groucho, you should not be so frivolous! “A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.” This is our Communist party.

Justin

(as Groucho) Sounds a little too rowdy for my tastes. What’s the big idea behind your party? How did your party get in the business of revolutions and violent upheavals? (aside) Personally, get a violent upheaval whenever my wife asks me to clean the bathroom. (Harpo honks his horn)

Alex

(as Mao) “The force at the core leading our cause forward is the Chinese Communist Party. The theoretical basis guiding our thinking is Marxism-Leninism.”

Justin

(as Groucho) That’s great! That’s wonderful! That’s stupendous! I love half your theories.

Alex

(as Mao) Oh? Which half?

Justin

(as Groucho) The half that takes after me. The Marx half! (Harpo honks his horn) Well, it's been great talking with you Mao, but we really must be off. (to Harpo) We're late for your harp lesson. (Harpo honks his horn)

Alex

(as Mao) Oh, you should stay a short while longer and have some tea!

Ahmed

(as Announcer) Mr. Mao, you just said the secret word! (Harpo honks his horn several times.

Sound: Audience applause) You've won \$50! (Ahmed hands Alex \$50)

Alex

(as Mao) Wonderful! Stupendous!

Justin

(as Groucho) Glad you like it! Remember, you can tune a guitar, but you can't tuna fish! (Harpo honks his horn, Andria and Justin drop character. Blackout, Lights come up, the cast take off their costumes.)

Ahmed

Good stuff. Good stuff.

Andria

(cast comes downstage and addresses audience, Projection: *All of Chinese Literature Condensed*) That's it! We condensed everything you need to know about Chinese literature!

Alex

Our goal was to both entertain and educate you.

Justin

(aside) I think we only got half the entertainment and definitely only half of the education across.

Andria

We wanted to instill an appreciation for the great literary works of China in you all. Now some of you might think that we were plagiarizing parts of Chinese literature. (pause) Yeah, we were.

Alex

What could be more Chinese?

Alex

I'm Alex.

Andria

I'm Andria.

Ahmed
I'm Ahmed.

Justin
I'm Justin.

Andria
You're the audience and we're done!

All
Zai Jian! (All cast members high-five each other, do a Chinese bow, and exit)

CURTAIN

CHAPTER FOUR: DIRECTING JOURNAL

8/20/13

Auditions: Day 1, Hope

I managed to get the student production organization on campus, Project Spotlight, to let me hold auditions concurrent with their one-act festival auditions. I was excited to begin the audition process and even more pleased when we had a total of twenty-eight people audition for the shows. However, only fourteen of them chose to audition for my show. I was disappointed because I sent out an announcement on the theatre listserv and have been publicizing on social media and to my friends. Perhaps they were intimidated by the Chinese content of the show, or didn't have the time to commit to a full-length show this semester. About half were freshmen and at least six were male. There are generally more females who audition for plays than males and in my experience directors fight over who gets to cast the boys. I know at least five more people will audition tomorrow.

8/21/13

Auditions: Day 2, Callbacks, and Casting

We had sixteen new people audition today including several very good freshmen and a good deal of males. I called back seventeen people. It was probably more than I needed but I wanted to be sure I could cast who I wanted. It's always a challenge to work with three other directors and share across who auditioned, but there is no way I could have gotten thirty-seven people to audition by myself for four roles. The call back was hectic as usual. Once I got all seventeen in the room, I talked a bit about the play and highlighted the ensemble effort I was

looking for. *All of Chinese Literature Condensed*, like the Reduced Shakespeare Company's series of shows relies heavily on the dynamic between actors more than the conflict between characters to keep the show moving and audience interested. I had already made a list of the physical types I wanted in the show (one fat actor to play Mao, Lu Zhi Shen and other roles; one skinny actor to play Jia Bao Yu, Du Fu and other roles; and one muscled actor to play Guan Yu, Wu Song, and other roles) so fitted everyone I called back into at least one of those types.

I had selected four two-page scenes for the actors to read. Due to time limits I could not see impressions of the famous people each of my actors had to impersonate. No chance to see Groucho Marx, Jerry Seinfeld and the others. But at the end of the day I had four actors selected as my first choice and four as alternates in case I needed to "trade" them with the other directors. I was pretty fortunate that three of my actors went unchallenged by the other directors and only one was wanted by two directors. Eventually I had to give him up to the other director and cast my second choice but I think I will have a very good core dynamic. Two older actors and two freshmen make up my cast. I am very excited.

8/23/13

Finding Stage Managers and Confirming Cast

In my previous experience with directing I learned that a good, organized stage manager is an invaluable asset to any theatrical production. I wanted to make sure I had one. I managed to recruit a female freshman SM with a little previous experience to run the production, but she dropped the show within a day to attend to sorority activities. Mark Routhier and I discussed previously that getting cast and crew to stay committed to the show would be the one of the most challenging parts of the production, and I cannot offer independent study credit or financial

incentives for my cast and crew. I will have to rely on close personal relationships and friendships with them in order to make sure they do not “flake out” and quit the production. Free donuts will help.

Just before my first stage manager quit, I managed to secure another female freshmen theatre student to be my assistant stage manager. After talking with her about the situation, she agreed to become the stage manager. Since I am a male and the show is cast with all males, I am very excited to have a female stage manager. Her perspective will give the show a balance that an all-male or all-female production lacks. She will be able to pick up on things that I or the male cast might miss. I have also contacted a BFA stage management major who can act as her mentor.

I followed up the general casting email with personal telephone calls to each actor and crew member to congratulate them and let them know that I was very happy to be working with them on this project. I then let them know we would have our first read through on Wednesday, August 28th.

8/25/13

Rehearsal Scheduling and Final Script Edits

I have combined everyone’s availability into a rehearsal schedule that I’m pretty sure will make everyone happy. Due to my teaching schedule (and one actor’s working schedule) we could not rehearse before 4pm on any weekday. That’s not too big of a deal. The real snag is that two people have classes until late on Tuesday, making it impossible to rehearse at all on that day. It’s not a deal-breaker but it is a little frustrating. I am very concerned that we will have to take Tuesday off when we get into tech week for the show. I don’t think I can afford to lose two

people that close to opening. However, I would hate to make them choose between their classes and my show. I'll just highlight the conflict that those two have and let them deal with it a little later. They will have to make the decision of class or show.

I spent today editing the script- replacing in the names of the actors I cast with the placeholder names I used when writing the piece. I also did a little bit of role-reassignment to better fit the physicality of the actors to the roles they will be playing. I am looking forward to the first read through with Alex, Matt, Ahmed, and Justin.

8/28/13

First Read Through and Signing Out Space

I got the final "cast edition" of the play printed out. It cost me over fifty dollars, but I guess you can't put a price on good art. I managed to get space signed out in the performing arts center for rehearsal, but was disappointed that very little time was available in our performance space, Studio 2. I'm afraid that the small rehearsal rooms won't give the actors enough space to adequately stage the show. Once we move into Studio 2 the actors will have to adjust blocking, volume, and reactions to fit that room. I will talk to one the professors about getting more time in Studio 2 during my tech week in October.

The first read through went well! Willow, the stage manager, said she was a little lost art parts but enjoyed the humor of the piece. Ahmed had to work late so I read his part. I excused him because he had been part of the reading workshop we did at the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre this summer and besides being a personal friend, I have directed him before. I emailed him an electronic copy of the "cast edition" of the play to read on his own.

8/30/13

Finishing First Read Through

We couldn't hold rehearsal yesterday because UCF was closed after 3pm for a football game. Funny how nobody closes a university or cancels classes for a play or other cultural event. Earlier in the day, our stage manager called me and let me know that she couldn't make it to rehearsal because her dog died. I was empathetic and let her off this time but highlighted that the production was important and that I would see her on Wednesday, September 4th for our blocking rehearsal. I hope people missing out on rehearsal does not become a trend. One of my pet peeves is for the cast and crew of my show to be late to rehearsal.

After the actors finally finished reading through the play we discussed the entire thing. They were all four very excited about it and thought it was very funny. Matt, who is a huge fan of the Reduced Shakespeare Company's series of plays, said he could clearly see the similarities between *All of Chinese Literature Condensed* and *The Complete History of America (Abridged)*. Ahmed and Justin were surprised at how funny it was. Alex said he thought it would be similar to "scripted improv." I hadn't thought of the play in that way, but I did want the audience to think the actors were being very playful. I will try to encourage the idea of "play" once we move into the blocking part of rehearsals

9/1/13

Props List, Costume List, No Stage Manager

Willow sent me an email today writing that she couldn't commit to the show due to family issues. The production now has no stage management. I was supremely disappointed because in addition to starting rehearsals with both a stage manager and an assistant stage

manager, I have been asking every stage manager I know for help on this production since January 2013. Everyone had already gotten assignments or was too busy with classes to commit to a full length show. I am coming to find that a lot of directing and producing is people management and recruitment. It's especially difficult when dealing with flighty college freshmen. I pray that nobody in the cast drops the show. If that were to happen then I would have to reduce the full scale production into a staged reading. I can't do it all on my own.

I spent much of today going through the hard copy of the script to make a props and costumes list. I cut a few minor items that couldn't be re-used for another character, but the list still looks a little daunting, especially the Chinese costumes. I'll have to see what I can get for free from local theatres, then decide how I can construct the rest on a budget.

9/2/13

Edits

Labor Day was spent looking over the play and making some edits. Mostly I corrected typos and clarified things but I also did work on the structure of the play. I cut the part where all four actors describe going down into the library basement where all the creepy history majors live. It didn't really fit the play.

I noticed in re-assigning the roles I gave Justin and Matt several more characters than Alex and Ahmed. I corrected this. The biggest glaring error I found was in the final scene between Alex, Matt, and Justin. Ahmed isn't in it. He introduces Groucho (Matt) and then exits. After the scene ends he comes back on stage only to bow at the end of the play. That just can't work. I re-tooled the beginning and end of the scene with Ahmed as the announcer for the 1950s game show that Groucho Marx hosted: *You Bet Your Life*. It works out well because *You Bet*

Your Life was an inspiration for the scene originally. Now that all the edits have been completed, I have to re-print everything. I wish I had a budget for this.

9/4/13

Table Work 1

I created a closed Facebook group for the cast of the show, taking advantage of everyone's addiction to social media. I posted several Youtube videos of things that influenced me in writing the play: Jerry Seinfeld's stand-up comedy, Mao Ze Dong giving a speech, Groucho Marx in *Duck Soup* and *You Bet Your Life*, and a clip from the 1980s CCTV version of *Journey to the West*. I told the cast to watch each of these videos as homework/character research. Hopefully seeing the videos and discussing them will help the actors to grasp the tone and style of the play. These will also visually inform my design choices for technical elements.

Table work went well. We read through the play slowly, taking time to answer any questions that came up. I explained some background information on the four classical Chinese novels- the historical background and specifics of the characters. The actors all really started to get into their roles. However the two freshmen actors, Justin and Matt, do need to work on their impressions. I emailed Matt more videos of stand-up comedians like Jeff Foxworthy and Rodney Dangerfield. I emailed Justin clips of Elvis so he can work on his "The King" character. We made it through act one before rehearsal ended.

9/5/13

Table Work 2

Ahmed had a schedule conflict with this rehearsal so he could not attend. We finished table work with the remaining three actors. I was quite impressed with the work that both Justin and Matt had done on the Whitesnake section of the play. They did a pretty good job of singing with the music and were enjoying it. I have been most impressed with Alex. He consistently brings new things to the table and always makes the stronger choice when acting. I am concerned with Matt. He has been slower to work on his characters and the Confucius section of the play is pretty terrible. I'll send him more youtube videos of stand-up comedians.

9/6/13

Table Work 3 and Reading Prep

Ahmed had a schedule conflict with this rehearsal so he could not attend. I spend this rehearsal going over each major character with each actor. I gave them background on the character, the work that it was from, and the style I wanted the character performed. We also watched clips from the 2011 CCTV version of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Elvis's Aloha from Hawaii performance, a hippie drum circle, and a movie version of *Outlaws of the Marsh*.

After that we jumped around from scene to scene, working on the most difficult parts. I think the Daoist beat poetry section will be really fun once it all comes together. I encouraged Alex to really get into the drumming. When we were working on Matt's Confucius scene I told him to relax and speak as if he were cracking jokes with his friends. It was much better today and I hope will improve with time. I think he just needs confidence.

9/9/13

Reading in Front of the Committee

I was very nervous before committee reading and wanted everything to be perfect. I got to the room thirty minutes early. I set up four music stands for the cast to read through while standing in order to get some physicality into the characters. As each cast member entered the room, I did my best to joke around with them and put them at ease. I lead them through some physical and vocal warm ups. My committee chair Mark Routhier and committee member Tan Huaixiang were present but committee member Mark Brotherton couldn't make it.

I thought the reading went pretty well, but noted parts in my script where it could have been tightened up a little bit more. I was a nervous wreck during the reading, but did my best to read the stage directions and play what sound elements I had prepared. For the most part, everyone's characters were well defined and different from each other but I noticed that they could be improved upon even more. That will come with more rehearsal.

Afterwards, Mark and Tan gave me some great feedback on the play. Tan liked that I was presenting authentic tales from Chinese literature and was impressed that I had read all ten of the works I selected for condensation (and even more that didn't make it into the show). Mark Routhier had several really good notes about the play, but one really resonated with me: "Make the audience want to grab these books and immediately begin reading them." He said I was just one step away from achieving this and with a little more historical context and better transitions between works I could have something really special. Tan and Mark also had some more specific comments about the show that could improve it as well. It's back to re-writing the play again.

9/10/13

Re-writes for the Final Time

Taking all that Mark Routhier and Tan told me to heart has been helpful. I went through the play again, line-by-line, and added in context. I felt that the condensations of the books themselves didn't need much change (except for *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Art of War*) so put much of the context on the "outside" of the scenes. Mark Routhier's suggestion of using the spaces between the scenes for both segue and context proved very useful. Counter-intuitively, it helped me write both context and segue better. I also made the discovery during my review of the play that it would be better to have *The Art of War* come after *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, because of the war and conflict theme, and then have *The Dao* come after *The Art of War* because of the inherent anti-war themes of Daoism. I worked until late in the night on these edits and finished the entire context/segue sections but did not get to editing *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Art of War* scenes.

9/11/13

Blocking 1

Because I didn't finish my edits on the entire script, I decided to spend this rehearsal time getting the blocking done for the sections of the play that I was sure weren't going to change: *The Outlaws of the Marsh* and *The Collected Quotations of Mao Zedong*. I also told the actors to, "Continue to learn your lines, but realize that there will be some changes. Be flexible." I kept a light mood during the entire rehearsal in order to nip any discontent about getting a new script 30 days before we open in the bud.

I let the actors come up with their own blocking for the most part and cleaned up where it needed to be cleaned up. The minimal set and "playful" nature of the show allowed this to work.

Ahmed and Alex are really following their instincts. My challenge will be to get Matt and Justin to take some chances when blocking.

9/12/13

Blocking 2

I handed the final (I hope) version of the script to the actors today. Ahmed and Alex grumbled about the script changing a lot, but I made it a little better for them by brining donuts. Nobody can complain when you get free donuts. I had blocked the *Dream of Red Mansions* scene and *The Legend of Whitesnake* scenes the night before so I gave the actors blocking for those scenes. We spent the rest of rehearsal in much the same way as before: actors following their instincts and making up their own blocking as they felt the need to move. We went through all of Act II and started in on Act I. Tomorrow I hope to finish blocking the show and then get a quick run in.

9/13/13

Blocking 3/ Pizza

About two hours before rehearsal was to begin, I received a text message from Matt stating he couldn't come to rehearsal because he had a computer project due. I was quite angry and didn't trust myself to respond to him at that moment. I had to re-plan the rehearsal on the fly. I convened the actors and told them the situation. We blocked the *Threw Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems* scene because it was the only scene we hadn't blocked that didn't involve Matt. After talking with the cast about their characters and reinforcing the need to get off book, we decided to head to a local pizza place for dinner.

The more I do plays, both as an actor and as a director, the more I find that establishing connections among the cast is essential. Not just connections on stage between characters, but personal connections. It was great just hanging out with my cast, not working on the play at all. Ahmed and I swapped tips on how to pick up chicks and Justin and Alex chatted about life in south Florida. I should do this once a week!

9/15/13

Down One Actor

After trying to get in contact with Matt via email and phone multiple times on Saturday and Sunday, he finally called me back on Sunday night at 8pm. I think we both pretty much knew what he was going to say. His classes were more difficult and time consuming than he expected so he felt he couldn't make the choice to commit fully to the play and his studies. I said that I understood his position and let him go from the play. We set up a time to meet next week so he could give me back the script.

Because Matt wasn't really working out with the play or meshing with the other actors, I wasn't as mad as I could have been. I am pretty proud of myself that I didn't ream him out, saying the grad school equivalent of "You'll never work in this town again!" I just wish he could have come to the decision and gotten back to me sooner, like Thursday night instead of Sunday night. Now I have to scramble for another actor.

I immediately called Alex, Ahmed and Justin to let them know the situation and that we would be running lines and (hopefully) holding auditions during rehearsal the next day. I then contacted my other graduate school friends and asked them to make an announcement in their classes that I was looking for a replacement actor and stage manager. My thesis committee got

an email as well, informing them of the situation. I also posted that I was looking for talent on craigslist and Greenroom Orlando. Prepare for the resumes and headshots to pour in!

I was pleasantly surprised when so many people auditioned for the show at the beginning of the semester, however I am quite nervous about how many people will still be available to step into this role in the middle of the semester. I will just have to see.

9/16/13

Running Lines and Auditions Redux

I received a few headshots and resumes from my craigslist and Greenroom Orlando audition notices. Nobody looked like they were available for the time commitment I needed. More promising were the UCF students: I got one email from an actor that I called back during the initial auditions and set up her audition during rehearsal. I had two more girls interested in the role so we had three people come in for an audition.

I had never auditioned one actor to replace an actor with three other actors already cast. I didn't really know how to handle it, but think I did well. I had Alex, Ahmed, and Justin seated with their scripts and had each auditioning actor read a few short scenes with them. The first auditioner, Andria, did a great job and was already personal friends with Justin, a big plus in my book. Andria joked with the cast and myself. She dove right into the role of Confucius and played the jokes at the right time. The next two auditioners weren't very experienced actors and didn't seem to "get the show." The rest of the rehearsal time was spent running lines with the actors.

Towards the end of rehearsal, Justin mentioned that one of his best friends was an experienced stage manager who was available and willing to help out with the show. I was

stunned. I quickly got her contact information and quizzed Justin about her credentials. Her name was Adriana and she was a freshman who had been a stage manager for their high school in south Florida. Once rehearsal ended, I gave her a call to make initial contact. She seemed positive, organized, and excited to be working with the show. I told her to come on down to rehearsal Wednesday. I really hope she can be a new, dedicated member of our production team.

9/18/13

New Stage Manager and Final Auditions

Adriana arrived early to go over stage manager things with me. We had a good talk and I laid out clearly what I expected her to be responsible for and what she had the power to do. She agreed with me and seemed to be right in her element during rehearsal. The cast seemed to like and accept her as well. I gave her the newest edition of the script.

Between Monday and Wednesday I received emails from two more actresses who were interested in auditioning. I scheduled them for the same type of audition at the same time as the auditions on Monday. Ahmed, Alex, and Justin read with both of the girls. The first girl, Michelle, did a pretty good job. She seemed to understand the jokes in the play and had taken a theatre class with Alex. She established a good relationship with the other actors in character. I liked her positive attitude. The next girl was a newer actor and while she showed a little promise, I didn't have the time to put in that much work on getting her up to speed.

For the rest of the rehearsal I got the cast up on their feet and had them "walk through" the parts of the show that we had already blocked so that they could start combining physical actions with the lines of the show.

9/19/13

The Gang's All Here

The casting decision came down to Michelle or Andria. Both had good auditions and a positive attitude. Both understood they were stepping into an established role. Both had open schedules. After thinking it over and getting a reference from two other grad students on both actresses, I decided to cast Andria. I really liked her initial audition and callback in August.

I was excited that Andria and Michelle were joining the team but we encountered a little setback. Both Justin and Andria had to go out of town on Friday the 20th, Justin for a family emergency and Andria to attend a funeral. I was glad that they told me but not thrilled that we would be missing yet another rehearsal. But life happens. We decided to add two extra rehearsals to make up for the four we missed and give new cast member Andria more experience with the role.

We didn't have enough time to organically find the blocking, so I just gave it to the actors as we came to it. Andria did a pretty good job jumping into the thick of things. I assigned Adriana and Michelle to make a projections and sound list.

Since Matt had dropped the show, one of my main concerns was finding another actor who could play Confucius as Jerry Seinfeld, Sima Yi as Emperor Palpatine from Star Wars, and Groucho Marx as Groucho Marx. Matt didn't have a firm grasp on the characters and he didn't improve much during rehearsals. I will need to highlight the importance of either doing a very good impression or making the character your own to Andria.

9/20/13

Running Lines with Two Actors

Since both Justin and Andria had to miss rehearsal due to family issues, I decided the best use of time would be to run lines with Ahmed and Alex. Michelle and I played the other two roles and Adriana was on book. Originally, the cast was supposed to be off book by the 20th, but due to setbacks I have extended the deadline to the 25th. I was impressed that Ahmed has Act II completely memorized! Alex is still struggling with lines, especially in the newer parts of the show. I hope he can get his act together over the weekend and really nail the lines the next rehearsal.

Adriana and Michelle are embracing their roles as SM and ASM. They gave me a typed projection and sound list today. After rehearsal I told Adriana and Michelle that they were doing a great job. If there's one thing I learned by being a teacher, it's that positive encouragement goes a long way. I don't want to resort to using negative energy until I really need to make a point.

9/23/13

Continuing the Run and Giving Blocking

Today I met with Andrew, a UCF design/tech major, about working on projections for the show. He seemed really excited and happy to build the projections. We discussed the overall feel I wanted to achieve with the projections and the show in general. I gave him the contact sheet, the rehearsal schedule, the script, and the projections list. I asked if he wanted to help with lights as well, but he just wanted to stick to projections. There isn't much lighting in Studio 2 anyway. After talking for a few minutes he promised to attend a rehearsal sometime this week. I'm really excited he has joined the team. I have never worked on a show with projections and

don't know how to use the projector in Studio 2. Hopefully he can teach both Adriana and myself how they work.

I finished blocking the show over the weekend and so was prepared when all the actors came together for rehearsal today. I didn't want to crush their artistic impulses and tried to strike a happy balance between giving them blocking and letting them do what they felt was best in the situation. We progressed along quite well, finishing Act II and starting on Act I. After rehearsal I talked with Adriana and Michelle about getting some rehearsal props and costumes. I can bring most of the weapons and small things. The cast and crew will have to supply the rest.

9/24/13

Finished Run and Rehearsal Props

At long last I got all the blocking disseminated to the three new girls in the show. Now I need to run the whole thing so that Andria can get the blocking down and the other actors can remember it with their bodies and not their minds.

Today we added in rehearsal props: bathrobes, hats, swords, sticks, books, and a rake. It really made the actors conscious of when they would be off stage, on stage, changing backstage, or changing in front of the audience. I realized I need to get Michelle on props tracking ASAP so that we can figure out where everything needs to start and stop. Maybe a shelf needs to be added to the set in order to organize everything? We could certainly use some boxes backstage.

The actors got excited at handling the new props, like they always do, so I explained the safest way to use the larger props. I had to make sure the cast was focused on learning the blocking in order for us to catch up to where we need to be. At the end of rehearsal Alex commented to me "I think rehearsal is getting really fun now." Now I'm really happy. I'm

overjoyed that people are coming together on this little piece I wrote. I think it will be super fun for both audience and performer.

9/25/13

Lines and the *Journey*

Alex is still struggling with his lines. I have highlighted the need for him to get it under control. I will have to make sure that he gets the message. Sunday the 29th is the day when I expect everyone, including Andria to know their lines with little to no prompting! We have to be off book before I can work the scenes to get to performance level.

Because we were focusing on characterization for the *Journey to the West* scene, I took five minutes out of rehearsal today to show the cast and crew some clips from the live action intro to the CCTV 1987 show *Journey to the West*. Then we watched the intro to one of the cartoon versions of *Journey to the West* called “Monkey Brother.” Everyone seemed to enjoy it, but I think they also got the image of the foursome traveling onward: Sun Wu Kong in front, followed by Tang San Zang on his white horse, then Zhu Ba Jie, and Sha Wu Jing in the back. We rehearsed the scene again and moved on. The cast is really getting into *The Outlaws of the Marsh* scenes. Those are looking really good.

Andria, being new to the production also needs some help with clearly creating distinct characters. But besides creating good characters, I also need to work with the cast on playing the fictionalized versions of themselves. I need to see the distinct switch between “acting” and “being.” That is the through line of the play.

9/26/13

Stage Combat and Through Lines

I have always had an interest in stage combat, going back to high school acting classes and taking a stage combat class in my undergrad. That class was the most fun I have ever had! I was excited to work some good stage combat routines into the show and for the opportunity to work with weapons different from the rapiers that most theatres use. We have two Chinese wushu swords, one pu dao, two sticks, and a rake.

Stage combat is one more way to show character, establish mood, and advance the plot. It should have a feel that seamlessly flows into the show. Fitting with the theme that these four actors are performing the show for the very first time, I wanted to give the stage combat an “amateurish” feel without it being amateurish. Safety was my top priority and I made sure to go over the guidelines of stage combat safety with everyone. *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has all four characters onstage engaging in stage combat, but the biggest task turned out to be Wu Song fighting the tiger. The challenge was to have both Ahmed and Justin visible to the audience until the very end of the fight when Ahmed collapses on Justin. Adriana and Michelle offered the suggestion of changing Wu Song getting the tiger into a headlock into Wu Song beating the tiger in the head. It was a more dramatic and cleaner choice, so I took it. I worked with both actors to develop a character-and-dialogue driven fight scene that I am proud of.

After we got all the fights blocked, we worked *The Art of War*, *The Dao*, and *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems* scenes. I again highlighted the need to make each assumed character distinct. Perhaps it’s a little difficult to get into the mindset of acting multiple roles but the four actors need to have a strong “base character” as a fictionalized version of themselves. This then allows them not to shed that “base character” but to play a second character as their “base character.” I brought up the example of The Muppets. They are all characters who are

acting in a show and playing other characters onstage: Mrs. Piggy is an overacting diva in her “base character” but she can be playing a nurse or space captain in her other roles. Alex and Ahmed seemed to respond to that example. I’ll look for a clip from *The Muppet Show* on Youtube and link it to our closed Facebook group so everyone can see.

9/27/13

Finished Run and Working

I wanted to get this first run done so that Andria and the SMs could be on the same page (get it?) as me with blocking and I could start to work the sections that I had noted as needing more polish. But before rehearsal Michelle’s friend had some heart trouble and she had to take her to the hospital. We only had Adriana during this rehearsal.

I reinforced the idea that Justin’s Tang San Zang needed to be more serene and calm. He is a living Buddha and should be placid in all things. I told him to be more like Mr. Spock from *Star Trek*: limited emotions and slower speech.

Alex had a great idea to save props and be creative at the same time. Instead of three people using drums for the Lao Zi drum circle scene, we could just have Alex with a drum and the other two sitting and drumming on rehearsal blocks. This not only creates a better stage picture with different levels, but also solves the problem of finding two more drums! Great job Alex!

On a sad note, when I was taking the rehearsal props back to my car after rehearsal, I didn’t watch my step and rolled my ankle. It really, really hurt and I have been hobbling all day since then. At home I put it in an ice pack and kept it elevated. I’ll take this as a sign that I am doing too much.

9/29/13

Breakfast Sunday Run

It was kind of a bummer to rehearse on Sunday morning, but since UCF had a football game on Saturday and cast members had conflicts on Sunday evening, it was the only time. As a bonus, we were able to sign out Studio 2! Doing a run of the show in the correct space would give everyone an idea for the proper timing, spacing, and volume level for performance.

I brought bagels, donuts, coffee, and orange juice. Everyone enjoyed it as I set up the room. We introduced new props, like the flashlights for introductions, and new elements, like the sound effects and music I built the day before. Due to the new elements and stopping to work several things (I swear I tried to let them run!), we only got through Act I and *The Outlaws of the Marsh* in Act II during the 3 hour rehearsal. I made a big list of things to work/fix, including *The Art of War*, *The Outlaws of the Marsh*, and the whole second half of *Journey to the West*. However, I was surprised how smoothly *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Dao* went! I made sure to congratulate the cast on that.

Lines actually weren't that much of a problem. Adriana noted that actors called line only twenty times, pretty good for seventy-three minutes of show. Blocking was the big issue, but that is to be expected when a cast moves into a space three times as large and has new props. We will have to run it several more times in order to get everything smooth like butter. Rehearsal ended on a positive note. I have a lot of costume, sound, and props creation ahead of me this week.

9/30/13

Working Hard

We had a good rehearsal today, but it started bad. I got to rehearsal early, like I usually do, and loaded in all the props while running lines with Alex. Both he and Justin are a little off on the Mao/Groucho scene at the end of the play. I spent a good fifteen minutes helping Alex. I'm happy to do it if I have time, but really highlighted again the need for him to get off book ASAP. October 3rd is when the cast is off book with no calling for line. At that point they will just run the show and I take notes.

Both Ahmed and Adriana were late in arriving due to their job, but I can't control that and didn't blame them. Michelle showed me some of the wigs she bought at the dollar store and they are perfect! I can easily modify them to slip on over the ears and under the chin like Beijing Opera beards do!

I wanted to work on the *Journey to the West* scene today and really try to get that piece up to par. Since he has a tendency to speak and gesture really fast, I told Justin to act as calm and serene as possible when playing Tang San Zang. "You are a Buddhist saint" seemed to resonate with him.

Andria wasn't doing as well playing Sun Wu Kong. I helped her a bit but realized that she was still shaky with her lines. At the end of rehearsal I told her I would send her a few clips from the *Journey to the West* TV show and told her to do some animal work on the role of Sun Wu Kong. I have always found animal work to be helpful for getting the physicality of a role down. Many times it also has informed the mental state of a character. She seemed excited when I brought it up to her, so I told her to work on it and show me what she had on Wednesday.

We worked *The Legend of Whitesnake* three times in a row to get the timing and singing down. The last two times we used the karaoke version that the actors will actually be performing

with. Everyone was very excited and happy to do that part of the show. It still needs some work but I think it will turn out just fine.

We went past our time a little on rehearsal tonight, but what can you do? Tuesday we don't have an official rehearsal but I think at least Alex and Ahmed will get together and run lines. I will be sound editing and making props. I am quite excited about the show and hope it will be something truly special.

10/2/13

Work/ Costumes and Props Initiation

I got to rehearsal early today and saw Michelle hauling luggage into the PAC. When I approached her, I noticed that the boxes were labeled with their contents: robes, wigs, cups, tiger skin, scrolls, wine pitchers, and almost all the props we would need for the show. How much help it is to have a stage management team! I can confidently say that I could not have such a fully-realized production without Adriana and Michelle.

I brought in the props that I was supplying and when the cast had assembled, went over their proper use and storage. As an actor I often wondered why the director or ASM didn't take the time to educate the actors how to use props. We had lots of simple props, like the plastic bowls and wine pitcher, but also more complicated/delicate props like the two wigs and beard/wigs. I am thinking of making an "over the ear hook" similar to Beijing opera beards in order to secure the beard to the actor. This would not only adopt a Chinese theatrical convention but be an easy way of keeping the beard in the right place.

I have never directed a musical or any play where the characters have to sing, so the Whitesnake part of the show was challenge for me. I wanted to work that specific scene some

more in order to get Justin's singing and timing solidified, but we only had time to run it once. I am not too satisfied with the Karaoke backtrack I purchased. I'll have to look around on the internet for a version with louder drums so the cast can keep on the beat easier.

10/3/13

First Full Run Through

The first run through went much better than expected! Ahmed, Justin and Alex were listening to each other, trying new things and obviously having a lot of fun together onstage. Andria had her lines down; a great achievement for someone joining the cast late. I was taking notes furiously but didn't stop the actors. I think it's important to give the actors a chance to see how the whole show flows together and build momentum. Drawing upon my experience as an actor, I remember getting the first full run done made me feel so much more confident.

A few weeks ago I had made a comment to the cast that I had toyed with writing *The Dao* scene of the play as a Beastie Boys/ Run DMC rap but ultimately decided on going with the hippie drum circle idea. Today during the run when Ahmed was supposed to read his section of *The Dao*, he rapped it to the beat instead. I almost fell out of my chair laughing. It was so perfect and funny. I told him to keep it.

Alex did a really funny new Innkeep character today during *The Outlaws of the Marsh* scene. Right away, I could tell the connection between him and Ahmed had changed for the better. I told him to keep it as well. Justin still needs to work on his Elvis and Groucho Marx impersonation, but his Tang San Zang is coming along nicely. I told him to be the perfect Buddhist saint when he plays that character, placid and calm at everything that comes his way.

He has a naturally fast tempo of speech so slowing that down will give more of a contrast between his “base character” of Justin and his “assumed character” of Tang San Zang.

10/4/13

Run/ Work Act II and Early Release

Since the scenes in Act II were less refined than the scenes in Act I, I decided to run and work Act II only today. I focused on Whitesnake, working the segue into and out of that scene. Then we ran the scene three times in a row in order to make sure everything was polished and everybody knew when to sing, speak, and fight.

I had created a very simple sock puppet for Justin to use as Lady Whitesnake. We worked on a hilarious transformation bit where he drinks the realgar wine, starts to slowly convulse and then puts on the white snake sock puppet to complete his transformation from a human into a snake. Michelle and Adriana almost fell out of their chairs laughing now that he was using the sock puppet. Andria’s character, Xu Xian, was supposed to see Justin’s transformation and fall over dead, but Andria found it so funny she continued laughing when she was on the floor. I hope the audience has the same reaction.

Andria as Confucius is coming along very well. She is using the microphone and mic stand to her advantage when “working the room” as stand-up comedians would say. I think all those youtube videos of Jerry Seinfeld, Rodney Dangerfield, Jeff Foxworthy and Chris Rock I sent her must have paid off. That is a huge monologue to learn and I know she will deliver it better when she has a little more confidence in her lines. I encouraged her after rehearsal to keep working hard on it.

We took some publicity shots for the show poster and facebook in costumes at the end of rehearsal. I also told everyone we would need to add in one more rehearsal on Sunday evening in Studio 2. I would bring snacks. I let everyone go a few minutes early (the first time I had done this) in order to get a few minutes of rest after a fun, tiring rehearsal.

10/6/13

Run in Studio 2

I decided to run the show in Studio 2 in order to let the actors get accustomed to the space and use the props correctly. I was most nervous about getting the sound to work, but I managed to hook up my computer to the sound system and it worked fine. I had initially purchased a karaoke back track version of “In the Still of the Night,” but it turned out to have very quiet vocals and the drums were a little too quiet for the actors to hear. I looked around on the internet and found a cover version for free, so I brought it in and we used it much more effectively. Tomorrow we will set the levels on the sound.

As we get closer to the performance date, I am focusing more on getting the costumes and props together and less on the acting. Today the cast got mixed up a little on their lines, but managed to power through. All the actors are doing a good job when they are playing characters, especially during the scenes from the four classical Chinese novels, but are lost when segueing between scenes. I wish I had more time to run the transitions between each scene. As it is now they are unpolished.

One challenge for the actors we discovered today is going to be costume changes. When writing the play, I knew there were some really quick changes- sometimes just one line- but I tried to fix that by allowing the actors to change in front of the audience. We still have several

really quick changes though. I will post a costume breakdown by actor backstage (behind the curtain) so that each actor can see what they need to be getting ready for during the brief moments when they are offstage. I think having more experience with the costumes and props will help.

Tomorrow at tech we will add in the projections that Andrew has been working on. I saw a few of them he sent me as a preview and they look great! Things are getting better and better with the show.

10/7/13

Tech Rehearsal 1

Today we integrated all the technical elements of the show. I supplied all the props needed and we got all the costumes together. Adriana didn't bring her computer so I had to use my computer to run the sound. It was trial and error to get the sound system to work but once we did it sounded pretty good. I realized I needed to get pre-show, intermission, and post-show music together. I wanted to use mash-up artist music because the combination of several different songs mirrored the show's combination of different books and cultures.

My friend Tori supplied us with a simple pipe and drape system for our set. This is probably the best solution to the set problem because it can break down easily for storage. We have some standard black cloth that can be pinned to the cable strung between the poles. I brought my bookshelf from home to complete the set, giving the actors an extra storage space for props and costumes. It was fitting to have a bookcase center stage for this play about Chinese literature.

I started by going cue-to-cue with the sound effects and music. I had spent much of the day before rehearsal finding and editing the sounds needed for the show. I was particularly proud of the soundscape I put together for the *Dream of Red Mansions* scene. It took a good hour to looking and edit the soap opera organ vamps. The cast loved them and really seemed to embrace that scene in the show. I was pleased how easily the sound integrated into the piece. Adriana and I simply made a playlist on her mac with all the sound cues for the show. It worked great. Many times the best solution is the simplest.

After the music cue-to-cue we decided to run Act I. I noticed that the actors were taking a long time to do all their costume and props changes. Michelle suggested that she could be stationed backstage to help everyone prepare. I thought that idea was great and since she had enough room backstage I gave her the go-ahead. The second half of Act I went much smoother with her assistance in prepping costumes and props. Another problem solved!

Alex was much better on his lines. I could tell he had sat down with his script at some point and gone over all the transitions, which were his weakest part. Unfortunately, the cast as a whole is still having trouble with the introduction to *The Dao* scene in the script. It was all jumbled up today. I gave everyone the note to review that section and be ready for tomorrow. We added some better rock-n-roll music for *The Legend of Whitesnake* section of the show, so I was not surprised when the actors got their timing off. The odd thing was that it happened about five minutes into the song, the same place they got off as last time. We will run that section tomorrow and make sure it is zipping along cleanly and clearly.

We had one huge element missing from the technical rehearsal: the projections. Andrew and I had previously agreed that he would be coming to this tech rehearsal to give us the slides and integrate them into the show. I called him three times and left messages each time. No

response. This is going to be a huge amount of extra work for me if he doesn't come through. I will continue to try and contact him.

10/8/13

Tech Rehearsal 2

Andrew finally got back to me that his phone died and he was busy with a tech emergency on another production. I am not sure if I believe him but didn't really care. I met up with him an hour before rehearsal started. Right off the bat, I noticed he was still working on the slides and was even missing several. When I questioned him he replied, "I didn't know what you wanted." I found that unlikely because I not only talked with him more than a week ago about what I wanted, but also supplied him a detailed projections list that Adriana and I had compiled. If that wasn't frustrating enough, over half the direct-from-literature-quote slides had spelling errors. I kept my composure and continued to work with him as quickly as possible on getting the slides in order before we headed downstairs to Studio 2.

Andria has a class from six to nine every Tuesday night. I had forgotten this until I walked into Studio 2 today. I was very frustrated, not at Andria or her class or her teacher or anybody else, just myself. The show is not going to have a full dress rehearsal with all actors and tech until Thursday the 10th, our opening night. After discussing the matter with Adriana and Michelle to get their opinions on the run crew side of things, we decided to have Thursday be our "preview" or "soft opening" show and then have Friday be our "hard opening." I should think of a better term for that.

We got Adriana's computer hooked up to the projector and started going cue-to-cue on the projections. We had to make alterations and changes as they came up. Several of the quotes

from *The Art of War* scene were missing, so we had to re-type them. After a few minutes, I got the impression that Andrew had never read the script. No wonder some of the slides were completely wrong! It wouldn't have been constructive to yell at him during the rehearsal, I just wanted the projections to work. In Andrew's defense, he did stay the whole two hour projection cue-to-cue and helped troubleshoot the entire process.

Due to Andria's absence we decided to run some scenes without her: *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems* and Mao's Little Red Book in addition to *Whitesnake*. Both Alex and Justin were really on point playing Mao and Groucho respectively. That scene is really starting to hum. I directed Justin to add some blocking as Groucho, doing his jokes directly to specific audience members. We worked on his Groucho Marx walk and using his eyebrows more. I know Justin isn't really a fan of the Marx brothers but I hope he can grow into the role by our opening night.

Michelle being backstage helping the actors prep really cut down on the time needed for costume changes. I think everyone having their actual show props and costumes helped as well. The rehearsal ended a little bit earlier than scheduled, but with tech fully woven into the show and one actor missing, we had done all that we could do for one day.

10/9/13

Final Dress Rehearsal

Due to a previous event signing out the space in Studio 2, we could not do a full final dress rehearsal in our performance space. We had to use the much smaller Rehearsal Room 2 without the set, projections, sound or many props. Probably the most frustrating part for the actors was having to adjust from a large space back to a small space, but knowing they would

perform for an audience in a large space tomorrow. We focused on acting today, trying to get the timing and flow of the show a little faster.

Andria's Confucius is coming along very nicely, considering that she had a limited amount of time to prepare for the role. I would still like to have her more confident and poised. I told her to think of herself as playing a stand-up comedian 70% of the time and playing Confucius 30% of the time. She seemed to understand that well. I made sure to rehearse all the scenes that Andria was in because she was unable to attend rehearsal last night.

Ahmed's dedication and excitement about the show is very apparent. He consistently performs excellently, whether he is giving information and completing a transition or acting a character in a scene. I always laugh at his Jamaican-influenced Kao in *Journey to the West* or his Australian-accented Wu Song during *Outlaws of the Marsh*. I am completely confident in his ability to perform.

Justin and Alex improvised a hilarious almost-kiss during *Dream of Red Mansions*. They lean into each other as Jia Bao Yu and Hua Xi Ren and then turn away at the exact most dramatic moment. I told them to keep it, and even added in a second near-kiss after Hua Xi Ren tells everyone she is in love with Jia Bao Yu. Justin is doing a good job when he plays the monk Tang San Zang. I had given him the note to play the character more sedately, that he was a Buddhist saint several times. He has taken that direction well and each time he performs I can see the character being created. Justin has also done a great job not losing energy during the informational segues between scenes.

Alex was hilarious as always today in rehearsal. His ad libs can be a little excessive but I don't think it will be distracting in performance. He does come from an improv background. His scene in *Outlaws of the March* as Innkeep with Ahmed went very well tonight. Alex kept up his

energy and focus throughout the segues. As a final note, I told the entire cast to make sure to hold for laughter when performing. I am so nervous and excited about our preview tomorrow that I do not know if I can sleep.

10/10/13

Preview/ Soft Opening

I didn't sleep much last night and spent much of the day worrying that Ahmed or someone would break their arm and not be able to perform the show. I got into the space an hour and a half early to start setting up. I was lucky that the group that had signed out Studio 2 before me wasn't there. I unstacked all the chairs and moved the tumbling mats against the wall for more space. I unlocked the AV cabinet and lowered the projection screen. Fortunately for me, all the actors arrived on time for their six o'clock call. Together we pulled the set and props out of storage. I am really glad Tori gave us the pipe and drape set because moving and setting up flats would have been even heavier.

The cast was upbeat and excited about the show, as most casts are before their first preview. I really wanted to have had the entire cast in the space with all of the technical elements for a full dress rehearsal before tonight, but life happens. After everyone had warmed up and set their props, I gave each actor and crew member a short "break-a-leg" thank you note on which I wrote sincere congratulations personalized to each of them. I even wrote "Shuai Duan Tui!- Break A Leg!" on the back of the notes in Chinese. Everyone was genuinely touched. Alex even commented "Wow, Whit actually has a heart." Thanks buddy!

I was a nervous wreck as the audience started to trickle in. My uncle and several of my friends came to the show, as well as committee chair Mark Routhier and committee member Tan

Huaixiang. I made sure I was in the hallway in order to direct audience members to Studio 2 for the show. When the time arrived, I stepped up and made the pre-show announcement. I tried to be cool and collected, like I had been many times at home in front of the mirror and in the shower, but stumbled over my words and forgot to tell people to silence their phones. I'm a trained actor! Why did I do this so poorly? Was it because I was not playing a character, just being myself? I settled in the back with my clipboard to watch the show and take notes.

The show started well, with all of the actors giving clean, specific energy and a lot of focus to each other. This carried through *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* scene and *The Art of War* but dropped off a lot during *The Dao*. In fact, the actors skipped about three pages! The whole part discussing the taijitu and explaining *The Tao* and *The Dao* was not performed. Instead the actors realized they were off and Justin jumped directly to his line "So Lao Zi was kind of a hippie?" While I am happy that they corrected themselves and kept the show going, I wasn't happy with dropping a bit of the show. The energy and excitement lagged more at the end of the act during *Journey to the West*.

Act II started tepid and didn't improve until after *The Analects*. Everyone seemed to just be going through the motions without listening to each other or building energy. But the production really took off from Whitesnake through Mao's Little Red book. The audience was all laughs during the soap opera *Dream of Red Mansions* and I think the actors got that extra jolt of energy they needed to finish the show strong. Act II was shorter than Act I and was more popular, judging by audience reaction. I maybe it was because the audience had an idea of what to expect, having seen the style of the play and all the actors already?

I don't know if it was because his friends were in attendance, but Alex added in several inappropriate ad libs. During *The Dao* scene when he was playing a hippie Daoist he said "I'm

so high right now,” and in Act II when Ahmed is dragged offstage to play Blue Snake he said “It sucks to suck, Ahmed.” I was extra peeved at this behavior because this happened when Mark Routhier and Tan Huaixiang were watching the play! I wanted to keep this play firmly in the “child friendly” camp in order for students and adults to both enjoy it. After the performance, I made sure he knew of my displeasure and understood he could not do it again.

We packed up the show in record time and cleaned Studio 2. I made extra sure that we put all the chairs back that we borrowed from other rooms. On the whole, I think the preview went over pretty well. I wish it had been more polished, but I think every director would say that. Errors were fixed and timing was sharpened. We will be stronger tomorrow for our “hard opening.”

10/11/13

Opening Night/ Performance #1

Arrived early again and almost had everything set up before the cast and crew arrived. I could tell the actors had less energy than last time so after we got everything set up I joked around with them a bit to ease the tension. I need to remember to do this more often with shows I direct. Positive social interaction gives the actor confidence in the role they are about to perform.

I talked with the patrons and handed out programs once the house opened. Several of my friends came to see the show as well as members of my family, so I was in a good mood. I was sure they were going to like it. The crowd was buzzing.

The play started fine but the cast got lost setting up the first book, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. I don’t know who got off on their lines but it was muddled. Once they began the scene proper things got better. During *The Art of War*, Ahmed rushed through his set up lines

really fast and didn't give Justin, Andria, or Alex enough time to change into their costumes. This resulted in a dead space of five seconds where everyone was changing off stage. We didn't have this problem last night! I made a note of it and will tell Ahmed to slow down his lines right before the change. The scene from *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems* was too quiet. I was in the back and had difficulty hearing Alex. *Journey to the West* still wasn't too good. It seemed to drag on forever. I gave Andria the note again that Sun Wu Kong is a tricky, curious, clever, high-energy monkey.

Act II was better than Act I. *The Outlaws of the Marsh* was lackluster until the two Rascals came on stage, when it picked up and we had a great closing scene between the guards, Lin Chong, and Lu Zhi Shen. Andria's Confucius sounded a lot like her Lao Zi tonight. I told her to differentiate between characters more. *The Legend of Whitesnake* went over very well with the crowd, as expected. I still feel there is some more space to rock out in the song. Maybe I need to write in a few more un-sung lines in the scene to fill the space? The rest of the show went well and the cast seemed to be having a lot of fun with Act II.

After the show, a young audience member came up to me and said, "I thought they (the actors) were really funny. And I liked the balloons." Glad to know someone thought the big balloon battle was funny, even if it was a ten year old girl! Her parents also enjoyed the show and told me as much.

Everything got packed up and we cleaned Studio 2 after I gave notes. The show went better than the preview last night, but still had some places it needs to improve. The cast and crew is getting better at the show each time it is performed so we can hope they will continue that trend tomorrow!

10/12/13

Performance #2

Setting up the show has become easy now. Everyone knows what to do and just comes in and does it. We got the whole thing up and ready to run in only thirty minutes. The cast came in with an upbeat, positive attitude so we played some physical and vocal warm-up games to keep them in that mindset for the show. Alex and Ahmed joked with each other; Justin and Adriana went over cue lines; and Michelle, Andria, and me discussed the show last night and how to make the quick changes quicker.

The audience arrived. It was the largest crowd we had seen so far: twenty-six people plus four more who came in late! I could tell the actors were energized by the audience; some of their friends and family came. I was happy to see this many people in attendance.

Right as the play started, I realized that the actors were all very excited. They kept the energy up from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* all the way through *Journey to the West*. Alex was hilarious as Zhang Fei and Ahmed's rap at the end of *The Dao* brought the house down. Andria was perfect as Sun Wu Kong tonight: clever, fickle, tricky, and quick. She even improvised a hilarious bit where she puts on the clothes that Tang San Zang gives her, but puts the headband on his white horse instead of her head!

The downside to the energy the actors had was ad libs, especially from Ahmed and Alex. I had told Alex two days ago to tone it down but tonight it was as if I told him to add more. I spoke to both Ahmed and Alex at intermission and explained that I was happy that they had energy and were committing to their characters but did not want any more ad libs in Act II.

The Outlaws of the Marsh was the best it's ever been! Ahmed and Alex were hilarious as Wu Song and Innkeep. Justin was terrifyingly hilarious as the tiger, and Alex was the perfect

blend of cowboy orneriness and Buddhist tranquility as Lu Zhi Shen. Andria was on point tonight as Confucius. If a joke bombed, she just acknowledged it and kept going- just like professional stand-up comedians do. I told her after the show to “Keep on doing that, it’s exactly what I want!” The audience exploded with laughter throughout *The Legend of Whitesnake* and *Dream of Red Mansions*. I noticed several of my Chinese friends giggling uncontrollably during that last section as well. The one part that the audience didn’t seem to enjoy as much was the scene between Groucho and Mao. Perhaps the audience was too young to recognize both of those figures? Maybe Mao’s bombastic speech had them thinking and not reacting?

I gave notes correcting the minor problems: Ahmed exited at the wrong time, Alex dropped a line, Justin entered too early as Guard, and other minor issues. Tonight was by far the best performance yet, both by the actors and by the audience’s response! I can’t wait until tomorrow night!

10/13/13

Closing Night/ Performance #3

I got into the space early, like usual, and prepared everything. Once the cast arrived, it only took twenty minutes to set everything up. We are getting really good at this. I did my usual thing of relaxing everyone through humor but got the vibe that the actors weren’t too positive about this particular performance. Alex and Ahmed looked tired and Justin seemed distracted. I know from experience that sometimes after a really good performance the cast tends to “relax” or “go on autopilot” for the performance afterwards. I wanted to nip that in the bud, so I gathered everyone in a huddle and told them all how much the performance had rocked last night and how

much I was looking forward to seeing what they can do for our final performance tonight. Everyone seemed more focused afterwards.

Audience members came into the Studio like they had each night before. I was surprised to see one of my former Chinese students in attendance! Committee Member Mark Brotherton came to this show, but left at intermission.

The show got off to a slow start, but I almost fell out of my chair when the balloons representing the Yellow Turbans flew everywhere! We usually only use six to seven balloons per show but tonight there must have been eleven! They went into the audience, but worse than that, Andria kept slashing at them with her sword! I had told everyone on stage combat day to be VERY careful with the weapons and make sure not to put them anywhere near the audience. Though they were not sharpened, they are made of thin metal and look real. An audience member who doesn't feel comfortable won't laugh. And I don't want to take anyone to the hospital.

Ahmed and Alex kept dropping their energy when delivering their punch lines, as if they were running out of steam midway through. I guess they thought the audience was unresponsive and wouldn't think the jokes were funny. But the audience can't even choose not to laugh if they can't hear the jokes to begin with. If anything, the experienced actor should "play up" the joke lines in order to let the audience know they can laugh.

The show limped along through *The Dao* and *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems*. One bright spot was that Andria continued to play Sun Wu Kong as a sprightly, clever monkey. She kept the energy up during all of *Journey to the West* and through to intermission.

Act II started much the same as Act I, lacking the kind of specific energy we need to make characters come alive. Justin's timing was off for all of Act II. He dropped several lines

and during the Whitesnake scene, he put the snake puppet on sideways. I don't think the audience understood that he was supposed to be transforming into a snake. An extra yellow balloon came onstage in the middle of the song. Alex had to acknowledge the balloon so he reached down and picked it up, then spoke, "It's my duty to protect mortals from the likes of you!" to Justin and popped the balloon. Justin and the audience doubled over laughing. They stumbled through the rest of the song and finished the scene.

I realized that the horn we used for Harpo during the Mao/Marx scene was a little higher pitched than what Harpo usually used in the Marx Brothers films. Perhaps that's why the audience didn't laugh as much as I thought they should have? If this production is mounted again I will have to spend more time searching for the perfect "honky" horn for Harpo.

The audience was pretty unresponsive- they didn't laugh at many things, but they were engaged and were as my old drama teacher would say, "smiling loudly." On the whole, I thought the show went better than our preview, but not as good as Saturday.

We broke down the set and parceled the props and costumes back to whomever supplied them. I called Tori and let her know that she could pick the pipes and drape up from UCF. We re-stacked the chairs and cleaned Studio 2 one last time, then had a group hug for a job well done.

CHAPTER FIVE: COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mark Routhier: Committee Chair Report

As chair of Whit Emerson's thesis committee, I had four primary responsibilities: to advise him on writing the play, observe a rehearsal, observe the actual performance, and assist and guide Whit through the written component of the thesis.

Whit worked extremely diligently and I was asked to sit in on three readings leading up to the actual performances. The readings improved each time, both in the quality of the play and the quality of the acting. The first reading was essentially a cold reading with actors who had not familiarized themselves with the script. It was, frankly, painful. The actors were stumbling and slow and Whit could feel my frustration so when two hours rolled around and we still had a good 25 pages of thick text to go, he stopped it. I asked him to "cut, cut, cut." The second reading was, again, a disappointment. The actors, again, were not as familiar with the material as they could have been, although the script was more compact. With the third reading, I could finally hear the play. The actors had had time with the script and were having more fun with the comedy. Whit and I talked and I advised him to continue to cut the play and to contextualize the novels he was summarizing. What was it a response to? How did it affect the work that came after it? What did it mean to Chinese culture?

I attended the first performance of *All of Chinese Literature Condensed* in UCF's Studio 2. It was, for all intents and purposes, a first preview because of the usual issues that come up when students present in the studios. Here are specific notes for that preview:

The Bromance of The Three Kingdoms started out better than it had before due to stronger acting, familiarity with the material and rehearsal. I was, however, lost in the final battle. I did not know who was fighting who and to what end. The frat boy references were overused and it took away from my understanding of the importance of this work. The Art of

War used projected quotes that helped me find the story. The references were clear but the thumb wars seemed trite and not as funny as intended.

I enjoyed the use of the simple props—balloons, bandanas, wigs, bongos, plastic weapons, and flashlights. They were used creatively and to good effect. Although some weapon wielding was a little too close to some audience members who were clearly uncomfortable with swords being swung near them.

The Journey to the West synopsis was easiest to follow. I would have liked more sound support throughout the show, either more generated by the actors or more generated through the speakers. I understand, though, much more clearly this time, the Taoist enslaving of the Buddhists. At the end of the first act, again, I was lost.

The second act was stronger. The Analects were clean and clear but I ended up asking the question: was Confucius a clown? I had never gotten that impression in my studies so it came as a surprise. The Legend of White Snake was the most creative, the most connected and the most fun. The parallels between Chinese Opera and American Heavy Metal worked very well. Whit and his actors could have been more bold with their animation and the volume, but the impulse was smart and entertaining. Dream of Red Mansions was also a good time.

I had difficulty with the Chairman Mao section. I enjoyed the idea of Groucho doing ‘You Bet Your Life,’ but I felt like I learned nothing about Mao except the surface details—Marxist, Leninist, Communist. I did not feel got inside the man, nor his writings.

Overall, Whit can take another few passes at this potentially important play. Context is very important and right now, it is sorely lacking. And comparisons to our culture and our references can also have stronger and deeper explanations. The notion that China and America’s

relationship will be one of the most important of the 21st century resonates, and Whit can find ways to explore that thesis statement in a more potent and potentially humorous way.

As for the written component of the thesis, I feel Mr. Emerson has served himself extremely well. His execution of the scholarship exceeds his execution of the play itself. He is clearly extremely well read and well versed in Chinese literature. He has strong opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of the culture. My wish is that his scholarly work and his particular point of view become more woven into the fabric of his play.

Mark Brotherton: Committee Member Report

This is a brief observation on the thesis work by MA candidate, Whit Emerson.

Although it was requested to be about the performance of *All of Chinese Literature Condensed*, I have made observations on all the work; performance, script, research, journals, etc.

On Sunday, October 13, 2013, I attended the first act of Mr. Emerson's production in Studio 2. I found the information and script to be intriguing, yet the production had many faults. The main problem was simply the cast and the excess of material. The cast and direction played most of the production "generally" without any clarity or specificity in character and motivation. The need for this specificity and clarity is especially needed in comedy. I do understand that the casting pool was not as strong as Mr. Emerson wanted, but I believe that the choice to mount the show rather than keep working on it as a stage reading added complications that could have been avoided and took away from the main objective, the script.

As for the script, I feel there is a great deal of possibility for its future. However, there are so many *updatings* of novels, themes, and characters, that its accessibility will be confusing to the audience with the *over-abundance* of knowledge. Even *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* only brings up *Titus Andronicus* for a brief moment. My

recommendations are to clarify each novel and its theme. Teach us the importance of why this should be done as a purpose to “entertain and educate American audiences about the great works of China in an effort to increase understanding between people...” as stated in his program.

Example, *The Art of War*, could have multiple scenes in various situations common to the American culture. You might have the possibility for multiple pieces instead of just the one.

As for research, journals, documentation, etc., Mr. Emerson was clearly on top of his game. The thesis documentation is well-prepared, well-organized, in-depth and thoroughly studied.

It should be understood; Mr. Emerson worked around limited resources, tight deadlines, and very little time in the studio. Instead of seeing these problems as roadblocks, Mr. Emerson saw them as a challenge. That should be noted.

Tan Huaixiang: Committee Member Report

In Mr. Emerson’s abstract, he stated that “*Aristotle stated in his Poetics that theatre’s dual purpose was to educate and entertain. Centuries later the Roman Horace and Indian Bharata echoed his same sentiments. I intend to realize all three theorist’s ideas on the theatre by creating an original educational and entertaining work and bringing it to performance.*” Mr. Emerson put down his ideas on paper, and then he successfully directed and produced his play on stage. Mr. Emerson condensed three thousand years of Chinese literature into a one hundred minute performance. By reading and watching his play, I believe Mr. Emerson accomplished his goal very well.

The four great classical novels of Chinese literature are from the Ming and Qing dynasties. They are the most influential Chinese fiction novels and well known to most Chinese readers of all ages. All these novels were adapted by Chinese theatre professionals into plays,

movies, TV series, cartoon movies, and other forms of entertainment. Mr. Emerson created his play based on the four great classical novels and other selected well-known Chinese works of literature. He titled his play *All of Chinese Literature Condensed*. As a Chinese reader and audience member, I enjoyed Mr. Emerson's play very much. The stories are well interpreted. They are believable, accurate, and entertaining.

Although the production was based on Eastern literature, his actors displayed a comical, hippie-like acting style that would appeal to and entertain western audiences. He presented simple and creative technical elements during the play that were effective and suitable for this production. For example, scenic pieces – a plain black curtain that provided a basic acting environment and costume change location; Projections that provided story locations and historical facts that helped audiences to understand each story. Props – a wooden horse head stick that the actor galloped across the stage. Colorful fabric wraps symbolizing a monk robe. Long hair clips used on the head represents a woman character; hair clips hanging down on the ears indicating a beard denotes a male character. Colorful headdresses – crowns made of fun foam were very effective. Costumes – long robes, fabric wraps, necklaces, etc defined each character in the story. All these elements created theatrical effects, plus comical style of acting that aroused the audience's laughter.

The stories are well-delivered. Transitions from one story to the next are smooth and coherent. It was fun to see how the actors tell the Chinese stories/literature to amuse American audiences. As a native Chinese audience member, I am familiar with Chinese literature. Mr. Emerson's production did a very good job presenting the stories, with added sense of humor. Mr. Emerson, as a playwright, director, and producer, cooked up an artistically brilliant play. As he said "*Perhaps a cooking metaphor is the best way to think of the play: I will chop up raw*

Chinese literature, the actors will boil it onstage, and the theatregoer will consume the mix, and exit the theatre full of entertaining intellectual nourishment.” This is exactly how I received the play. I am educated and entertained.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

As playwright and director, it was my job to create and guide the characters of the play in such a way that the audience can understand the message of the play while being educated and entertained. By integrating my own experience in China with American cultural touchstones I have created a work that is informative and exciting while remaining imminently performable. Audiences saw my play in UCF's Studio 2 a total of four times.

This sourcebook contains the part of my writing and directing process that can be shown on paper. However, artistic endeavor is not an exact science. I cannot hand this sourcebook to another director and expect the same results to be replicated exactly. Each director, actor and designer brings a new creative element to the process.

I learned something about myself in the process: I want to be a better writer in order to connect bigger ideas to themes that I want the audience to experience. I want to make bolder choices as a director in order to have more of an impact on the audience. I hope to grow artistically in the future; the knowledge and experience I gained from this thesis project will no doubt prove invaluable to my future self.

The show is pretty funny, but I want to warn future directors to keep the action real and the jokes swift. Truth be told, most of the humor is “throwaway jokes” anyway. I kept repeating the need to be “like popcorn, hot and popping,” to the actors. Resist the urge to turn the show into a “prop comedy” piece. The humor comes from the interaction between the four main characters with the convention that this is the first time they have performed the play. For the next director reading this, I must stress the importance of being open to your actor's suggestions. Make sure to drive the cast forward with specific, clean energy. For any future playwrights

reading this, I must stress the importance of being tenacious in your pursuit of realizing your ideas.

I found the audience reaction to this play to be very interesting. The mostly American audience thought the play was “clever” and “funny.” Many patrons commented that the second act was the strongest. At least four said that the Whitesnake scene was their favorite part of the show. I know of one person who came in to see the show as a completely blank slate but afterwards checked out *The Art of War* and *Journey to the West* from the library. Another person watched one of the recent movie adaptations of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The Chinese-American audience members commented more on the content of the scenes, especially on the *Journey to the West* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Several Chinese citizens attended the play as well. They were very appreciative of my efforts to foster understanding of Chinese culture. During the show I noted their excited and happy reactions to sections explaining the language and especially the *Dream of Red Mansions* scene.

Memory is all that is left of the production, but what I have left to the next director in this sourcebook of my choices, ideas, successes, and errors is precious. Now I pass the “flavorful, slightly spicy, soup of knowledge” to any other director who is ready to take on a delicious challenge with this play: to educate and entertain.

APPENDIX A: ANNOTATED LIST OF CHINESE WORDS AND PRONUCIATION

Words are listed in the order they appear in *All of Chinese Literature Condensed*

Mandarin Chinese has 4 tones: #1 is flat and high, #2 is rising, #3 is falling and rising, #4 is falling. I will put the tone number after the phonetic spelling.

Ni Hao- Nee3 How3
“Hello”

Luo Guan Zhong- Luow2 Gwan4 Jong3.
Author of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Han Dynasty- Hahn4.
A dynasty that ruled China from 206 BC-220 AD.

Wei- Way4.
Kingdom in South China. One of the Three Kingdoms.

Wu-Woo2.
Kingdom in South China. One of the Three Kingdoms.

Shu- Shoe3.
Kingdom in South China. One of the Three Kingdoms.

Liu Bei- Liew2 Bay4.
Cousin to the emperor and ruler of Shu.

Guan Yu- Gwan1 You3.
Posthumously known as the God of War.

Zhang Fei- Joang1 Fay1.
Ferocious man and sworn brother of Guan Yu and Liu Bei.

Cao Cao- Tsao2 Tsao1.
General born in northern Anhui province. Founded Wei kingdom.

Dong Zhuo- Dong3 Zuowa2.
Warlord who tried to take over the late Han Dynasty.

Sima Yi- Suh1 Ma3 Ee 4.
Tactician depicted as evil and manipulative in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Yuan Shao- Yuan2 Shaow4.
Warlord opportunist who tried to seize power circa 189AD.

Sun Ce- Swun1 Tshu4.
Founded Wu kingdom. Son of Sun Jian.

Chi Bi-Chur1 Bee1.

“The Red Cliffs” of the Yangtze river where a huge land-and-water battle was fought.

Tai Ji Tu- Tie4 Gee2 Too2.

The Chinese term for the “Yin Yang symbol.”

Yin-Een1.

The dark force in “Yin and Yang.”

Yang-Yong 2.

The light force in “Yin and Yang.”

Pinyin- Peen 1 Ein1.

Modern system of Romanizing Chinese characters used in the People’s Republic of China today.

Daoism- Daow4 isim.

The philosophy/religion proposed by Lao Zi.

Dao De Jing- Daow4 Duuh2 Jing1.

Written by Lao Zi, this book formed the Daoist religion.

Lao Zi- Laow3 Zuuh1.

Founder of Daoism and imperial archivist for the Zhou Dynasty. Wrote *Dao De Jing*.

Li Bai- Lee3 Bye 2.

China’s most famous poet and drunk. Friends with Du Fu.

Li Po- Lee3 Powah2.

Li Bai’s literary name or pen name.

Tang Dynasty- Tong2.

China’s Golden age 618-902AD.

Du Fu- Doo4 Fu3.

Destitute, starving poet. His house blew over in a typhoon.

Jinling- Jin1 Ling2.

Ancient name for the city of Nanjing in Jiangsu Province.

Sun Zi- Swun1 Zuuh1.

General and author of *The Art of War*.

State of Qi- Chee2.

State during the Warring States Period.

State of Wu- Woo2.

State during the Warring States Period.

King He Lu- Huuh2 Loo2.

King of Wu State during the Warring States Period.

Yue state- Youay4.

State during the Warring States Period.

Tang San Zang-Tong2 San3 Zong4.

Holy Monk who went to India in search of scripture. Also known as Tang Seng or Xuan Zang.

Guan Yin- Guan1 Een1.

Chinese Goddess of Mercy usually depicted holding a willow branch.

Sun Wu Kong- Swun1 Woo4 Kong1.

The Monkey King himself. Sort of like Superman crossed with the tricky Norse god Loki.

Kao- Cow1.

Old man who married his daughter to a pig-man.

Zhu Ba Jie- Jew1 Ba1 Jeay4.

Pig-man who was a general in heaven. Fights with a rake.

Sha Wu Jing- Sha1 Woo4 Jing1 .

Man who was a general in heaven. Fights with a Monk's Spade.

Cao Yu- Tsao2 You3.

Modern Chinese playwright and actor. Wrote *Thunderstorm*.

Lao She- Laow3 Shuuh3.

Modern Chinese novelist and playwright. Wrote *Teahouse*.

Mount Liang- Liang2.

Mountain in Shandong province.

Shandong Province- Shan1 Dong1.

Province north of Jiangsu in east China.

Song Dynasty- Song4.

Dynasty that ruled China before the Mongolians invaded.

Wu Song- Woo3 Song1.

One of the stars of the *Outlaws of the Marsh*.

Lu Zhi Shen- Loo3 Jurr4 Shen1.

One of the stars of the *Outlaws of the Marsh*.

Lin Chong- Lin² Chong¹.

One of the stars of the *Outlaws of the Marsh*.

Yang Gu County- Yang² Goo³.

County in Shandong province.

JingYang Pass- Jing³ Yahng².

Pass in the Jingyang mountains in Shandong province.

Mount Wutai- Wu³ Tie².

Holy Buddhist mountain in Shanxi province.

Kaifeng- Kai¹ Fung¹.

Capital of the Northern Song Dynasty.

Yan'an Prefecture- Yan² Ann¹.

Area in west-central China.

Xiangguo Monastery- Shang⁴ Guow².

Big monastery in Kaifeng. Still in operation today.

A Mi Tuo Fu- Ah¹ Mee³ Tow¹ Fu¹.

"Buddha be Praised."

Lohan- Luoh² Han⁴.

Mystical saint with holy powers. Also known as an arhat in Buddhism.

Gao Qiu- Gow¹ Choow².

An evil and corrupt man. Marshal Gao Qiu is the antagonist of the *Outlaws of the Marsh*.

Duke of Lu- Lu³.

Ruler of the state of Lu during the Warring States period.

Yuan Dynasty- Yuahn².

Mongolian Dynasty that ruled China 1271-1368AD

Kun Qu- Cun¹ Chew³.

Style of opera performed in east China.

Jiangsu province- Jiang¹ Su¹.

A province in east China.

Zhejiang province- Juh⁴ Jiang¹.

A province in east China.

Eastern Jin dynasty- Jein4.
Dynasty that ruled China 317-420 AD.

Beijing opera- Bay3 Jing1.
Style of opera that came together in the capital of China. Also called Peking Opera.

Hangzhou- Haong2 Joe1.
Large port city in east China with a famous scenic lake, capital of Zhejiang province.

Xu Xian- Shoe3 Shean1.
Doctor and scholar. Husband of White Snake.

Fa Hai- Fa2 Hai3.
Antagonist monk of *The Legend of White Snake*.

E Mei- Uuh2 May3.
Mountain in Sichuan province in south west China.

Zhenjiang- Jen4 Jiang1.
Smaller city on the banks of the Yangtze River in east China.

Kun Lun mountains- Cun 1 Luenn2.
Mountain range in western China.

Zhong Nan Qing Nu- Jong4 Nan2 Ching1 New3.
“Putting men before women.”

Cao Xueqin- Tsao2 Shuay3 Cheen2.
Author of *Dream of Red Mansions*, left incomplete.

Zhen family- Jen1.
In *Dream of Red Mansions*, a rich family related to the Jias living in Nanjing.

Jia family- Jia3.
In *Dream of Red Mansions*, a rich family living in Beijing.

Jia Bao Yu- Jia3 Bao3 You4.
Pretty-boy protagonist of *Dream of Red Mansions*.

Qing Dynasty- Ching1.
The last dynasty to rule China. Ended in 1911 by the Xinhai revolution.

Grandma Jia- Jia3.
Matriarch of the Jia family. Dotes on her many grandchildren.

Lin Dai Yu- Lin2 Die4 You4.

Sickly-beautiful woman Jia Bao Yu falls in tragic love with.

Hua Xi Ren- Hua1 Shee2 Ren2.

Jia Bao Yu's maid with whom he has a sexual encounter.

Xue Bao Chai- Shuay1 Bao3 Chai1.

Jia Bao Yu ultimately enters a loveless marriage with her.

Mao Zedong-Mao1 Zuh1 Dong1.

Peasant from Hunan province turned ruthless Communist Party Chairman and ruler of China.

Zai Jian- Zai4 Jian4.

"Goodbye"

APPENDIX B: PRODUCTION PICTURES



Figure 1 Justin, Alex, Andria, and Ahmed in performance deciding how to start show



Figure 2 Ahmed and Justin in performance during the thumb war part of *The Art of War*.



Figure 3 Alex in rehearsal as Lu Zhi Shen.



Figure 4 Alex as Li Bai and Justin as Du Fu rehearsing *Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems*.



Figure 5 Ahmed, Andria, Justin and Alex in Studio 2 rehearsing *Journey to the West*.

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